



Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, Plate 18

UNCG Acquires One-Millionth Volume for Jackson Library: Celebration Events Scheduled

This past spring, UNCG acquired the one-millionth volume for its Library, a first edition of William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, one of only 315 copies produced in 1826, a year before Blake's death. The volume is one of the most important illustrated books ever published, making it an especially appropriate selection to be incorporated into Jackson Library's significant Book Arts collection. That it was also produced by a major literary figure with artistic and printing skills is also appropriate for a university with many strengths itself.

This fall, we will formally present the book to the University as part of the Founder's Day ceremonies on October 1, and we will continue to celebrate the acquisition throughout the year. A calendar of celebration events for the fall is provided on page six.

Although the acquisition of one million volumes is a symbolic plateau, it is nevertheless an important milestone indicating that a library has acquired the significant resources that make it a major repository for scholarly research. Like UNCG itself, Jackson Library has grown into a major research institution. Including its one million volumes, the Library has over 2.7 million items and over 130 databases.

Since March, members of Friends of the Library have been contributing to efforts to raise money to celebrate this milestone and support the acquisition of the millionth volume. Friends' gifts have been an important source of funding for such earlier jewels in Special Collections as *The Book of Hours* and the Silva Cello Music collection. It is therefore altogether fitting that the UNCG Friends of the Library, one of the oldest in continuous operation in North Carolina, should also be closely involved in providing this gift and celebrating its acquisition. To date, about 100 persons have made contributions toward our \$40,000 goal for the celebration. If you have not yet made a contribution, we ask that you consider a donation. A reply form is provided on page four.

Then, this fall, come celebrate with us.

Among Friends is a publication of Jackson Library designed to communicate with the Friends of the Library about programs, events, resources, and services. With it, we hope to keep you informed about new developments, staff accomplishments, and other news. Please send any comments, suggestions, or story ideas to Special Projects Librarian Barry Miller, who can be reached by email at barry_miller@uncg.edu or by phone at 336-256-0112.

Five hundred copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$176.10 or 35 cents per copy; the cost was underwritten by Friends of the Library.

Dreamer of Dreams: William Blake, Poet and Artist

by Dr. William K. Finley, Special Collections Librarian

A man can scarcely be called normal who as a child saw angels perched in trees; who as an adolescent perceived Christ, the Apostles, and a host of priests and other religious figures strolling and singing in Westminster Abbey; and who as an adult communed with his deceased brother, called God "nobodaddy," and sometimes sat naked in his garden while entertaining guests. William Blake was hardly "normal"; but had he been, he would not today be considered not only a major Romantic figure but also one of the true geniuses and innovators in the dual creative realms of poetry and art.

In a letter to a friend, Blake showed his concern for the eternal verities by referring to himself as "one who cares little for this World which passes away." Blake was not being entirely honest with himself or his friend, for despite his frequently proclaimed indifference to the mundane society around him, he cared greatly about his own place in the world; but it is true that Blake was "other worldly" to a much greater degree than either his contemporaries or the vast majority of writers and artists to follow. In another letter, Blake stated, "Now I may say to you . . . that I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoyed and that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, see Visions, Dream Dreams, and prophecy [sic] & speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of Other Mortals." Blake may not have been removed "from the Doubts of Other Mortals," but today his growing reputation as both poet and painter, signalled by numerous articles, books, conferences, and exhibits on his works, rests on the fact that he did indeed "see Visions," "Dream Dreams," and "speak Parables." As Blake himself stressed, he saw life through his eyes, not with them. Behind Blake's poetry and art lies an intense, complex mysticism which makes him a compelling, controversial, and fascinating figure for today.

Even Blake's early years were hardly normal. Born in 1757 in Soho, London, the third of seven children of a moderately successful merchant, Blake,



William Blake from a drawing by John Linnell, 1821

largely self-taught, left all formal schooling when he was ten and became an apprentice engraver to satisfy an early longing for artistic and imaginative expression. Thus, although he would receive expert training in his artistic endeavors, his poetry would be the product of his own diverse reading and self-education and a fertile imagination linked with an intense religious orientation. Influenced at an early age by the philosophy of the Swedish philosopher Emmanuel Swedenberg and by his readings of such works as Edmund Burke's Of the Sublime and Beautiful, John Locke's On Human Understanding, Francis Bacon's Advancement of Learning, and Joshua Reynolds' Discourses, Blake developed a rather radical outlook on life. By the time he was in his mid-teens, he had produced his first works in his dual careers: he had begun writing poetry when he was twelve and had accomplished his first known engraving (not surprisingly with the religious focus that was to become his hallmark) when he was sixteen.

By the time he was twenty Blake was firmly entrenched as an engraver; and when he was twenty-five he had produced enough verse for some friends to collect into a privately printed little volume bearing the simple title Poetical Sketches. The

supernatural was to become a large part of Blake's life and art, and he recorded his visions in his early poetry and engraving. His obsession with the supernatural was to have repercussions for Blake both during and after his life and earned him a long-standing reputation as a man who was at least on the verge of insanity. The Romantic poet William Wordsworth acceded to this view but added a sympathetic and positive interpretation: "There was no doubt this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott." Wordsworth's words prefigured a more modern stance towards Blake and his work. If he was "mad," most disciples and critics of his poetry and art today would say, as Shakespeare did of Hamlet, that there is "method in his madness."

The 1780s were a time of both gain and loss for the young Blake, who was struggling to make a name for himself both as an artist and as a poet. In 1782 he married Catherine Bouchet, who would remain his mate and artistic helper for the rest of his life. In 1787 his younger brother Robert, the sibling to whom he was closest, died at nineteen. When Blake the next year produced There is No Natural Religion, the first of his religious interpretations and the first of his "illuminated printings" (text combined with art), he credited this technique to a series of discussions he held with his deceased brother. This work and All Religions Are One (also 1788) constitute the first of his many attempts at religious explication and visionary perception. In his illuminated printings, text and image exist in a definite symbiotic relationship on each page. At the end of this decade, Blake produced his first masterpiece of poetry enhanced by his art, Songs of Innocence (1789). Songs of Innocence and its companion volume Songs of Experience (1793) comprise Blake's most renowned poetry and are

seminal masterpieces of the Romantic movement.

Between these two milestones of early Romantic verse, Blake wrote The Book of Thel (1789), the first of a series of increasingly mythical religious texts which came to be known as the "prophetic books" (a term that broadly could be applied to all of Blake's work) and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1793), which also explored the question of faith and the relationship of God and man. Blake followed these with even more complex and more mystical views of his mythological/historical universe: Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793), The First Book of Urizen (1794), The Book of Los (1794), The Book of Ahania (1795), and The Four Zoas (1807).



Title Page of *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

In his "history" books--The French Revolution (1791), America (1793), and Europe (1794), Blake merges history and myth in an attempt to analyze man's world, past and present, and to relate it to his broad concepts of religion. Although these works are generally critical of contemporary society and the world of secular interests and political intrigues, each offers guidelines for salvation as Blake saw it. His later Jerusalem (1818) may be seen in relation to these works, for Blake suggests that man's salvation lies in understanding the symbolism of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Two additional works that held particular significance for Blake and are crucial to any understanding of his religious thought are his Milton (1810) and his illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy, which remained incomplete at his death. To Blake, The Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost were works of the greatest religious significance, and his response to these works absorbed much of his time and reveal much of his own theology.

Although Blake's reputation as poet-painter is best known through Songs of Innocence and Experience (who has not read and remembered "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" ?) and although he himself seems to have felt his work on Milton and Dante to be his supreme achievements, Blake's last complete work is an equally compelling masterpiece. Though Illustrations of the Book of Job (1826) does not offer Blake's illuminating poetry (the commentary being mainly Blake's paraphrase of Biblical text), the book demonstrates what is perhaps Blake's ultimate accomplishment as an engraver and illuminator and remains a controversial work because of Blake's interpretation of the trials of Job. In twenty-one magnificent plates, Blake essentially "writes" the story of Job as he saw it, lending his own distinct gloss to this visual portrayal. Called by book historian Gordon Ray a highlight among English illustrated books and included in Ray's list of the one hundred greatest illustrated books from England, Job has been studied mainly for Blake's consummate artistry. Yet the work is equally important as an indication of Blake's religious views, especially his comprehension of good and evil in the world. Blake's illustrations for Job are "picture poems," full of symbolic interpretation and mythic revelation.

The trials of Job held a life-long fascination for Blake, as indicated by several early prints which he produced in the 1780s to illustrate and interpret the Biblical text. In many ways Job is the culmination of Blake's religious thought, a fascinating ideology


that can be appreciated on several levels. An examination of the plates of Job will bear testimony to Blake's artistry; a careful consideration of his images and of his choice of text will reveal much of Blake's thought. If Illustrations of the Book of Job does not highlight Blake's ability to merge picture and poem as does Songs of Innocence and Experience, it nevertheless portrays perhaps better than any of Blake's other work the old adage "a picture is worth a thousand words." Since its completion to little acclaim in 1826, Job's reputation has risen steadily within Blake's canon. It is viewed today as one of the supreme accomplishments of the Romantic era.

There is no more fascinating and puzzling figure in literature and art than William Blake. Tabbed "Pictor Ignotus" (the neglected artist) by his first biographer in 1863, Blake is hardly ignored today. It was necessary for the "modern" poetry of Yeats, Whitman, Dickinson, and others; the art of Monet, Van Gogh and other impressionists; the psychology of Freud and Jung, to lead readers to a true appreciation of Blake's genius. He was indeed ahead of his time. His poetry and art attract; and his mysticism fascinates us today. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, the influence of his art and writing seems clear. In time we may come to understand--or at least to evaluate more properly--how well Blake accomplished what he saw as his "great task"--"to open the Immortal Eyes of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought."

Those wishing to contribute to the support of the Millionth volume celebration should clip the adjacent form to a check and mail to

Secretary
Friends of the Library
Jackson Library
UNCG
P.O. Box 26175
Greensboro, NC 27402-6175

A list of donors contributing as of July 10, 2001 may be found on page 5.

<p>I wish to help celebrate the acquisition of Jackson Library's one millionth volume and contribute to the Library's continued growth. My contribution of _____ is enclosed, payable to <i>Jackson Library One Millionth and Beyond Fund</i>.</p>		<p>Name _____</p>
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Sinal, Paul

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Solleder, Marian

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Umstead, Elizabeth

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Walz, Garry R.

Wharton, Richard L.

Widdows, Richard

Wilson, Frances A.

Celebrating the Millionth Volume for UNCG: William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

Fall 2001 Schedule of Events

William Blake: Dreamer of Dreams

September 15 - October 31
Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Special Collections
Division of Jackson Library, 2nd Floor Main Building

An exhibit featuring the millionth volume and other
Blake materials in Jackson Library's collection

**Presentation of William Blake's *Illustrations of the
Book of Job* as the One-Millionth Volume for UNCG**
Details to be announced.

Staged Reading of Archibald MacLeish's Poetic Drama "J.B."

directed by Dr. Marsha Paludan, Associate Professor of
Theatre, UNCG and performed by graduates of the
UNCG Theatre Program
Sunday, October 14 2:00 p.m. Brown Building Theatre,
UNCG

To celebrate Jackson Library's acquisition of William
Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, Dr. Marsha
Paludan will direct a staged reading of Pulitzer Prize-
winning poet Archibald MacLeish's poetic drama *J.B.*
Based on the book of Job, *J.B.* was a Broadway hit in
1957, starring actor John Carradine. For the 2 p.m.
Sunday, October 14th performance in the Brown
Building Theatre, Paludan plans to include projections of
Blake's illustrations as a backdrop.

Blake's Enlightened Graphics: Illuminated Books and New Technologies

Dr. Joseph Viscomi, Kenan Professor of English, UNC
Chapel Hill
Tuesday, October 16 7:30 p.m. Weatherspoon Art
Gallery Lecture Hall, UNCG

William Blake's illuminated printing was a new
technology in the 19th century. Today, new technologies
are being used to place the Blake Archive on the Web.
Join one of the world's leading Blake scholars for this
special event.

The Human Form Divine: Blake's Book of Job

Dr. Bennett H. Ramsey, Associate Professor of Religious
Studies, UNCG
Dr. Jennifer Keith, Assistant Professor of English,
UNCG
Tuesday October 23 7:30 p.m. Faculty Center, UNCG

A dialogue from religious and literary perspectives on
Blake's Book of Job

Create a Bookplate Family Workshop

Ann Grimaldi, Curator of Education, Weatherspoon Art
Gallery

Demonstration of Jackson Library's Washington Hand Printing Press

Paul Hessling, Assistant Catalog Librarian for Special
Collections, Jackson Library
Saturday, November 3 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Jackson
Library Lobby, Second Floor Main Building, UNCG

Join in celebrating Jackson Library's one millionth
volume by creating your own bookplate. Personalize
your growing book collection by designing and printing
an artful bookplate ready for use. Also take an up-close
look at a 19th century printing press in action.

Paideia Seminar on William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

Dr. Terry Roberts, Dr. Laura Billings, Mr. Evan Post,
and Ms. Cheryl Treadway, National Paideia Center
Tuesday, November 6 7:30 p.m. Virginia Dare Room,
Alumni House, UNCG

William Blake was one of the great artists, one of the
great poets, one of the great engravers, and one of the
most profound religious mystics of his time. How do
YOU (not someone else) respond to this powerful
figure? Join us for a Paideia seminar to explore that
question.



*All events are free and open to the public. For more
information, contact Barry Miller, Special Projects
Librarian, at 336-256-0112 or by email at
barry_miller@uncg.edu*

Interest in Blake Soaring

by Barry K. Miller, Special Projects Librarian

For a commercial engraver who remained poor throughout his life and was buried in a common grave, William Blake has recently been the subject of a great deal of attention, not just for his poetry, but also for his art.

In 2000, the Tate Gallery in Britain presented a major exhibit of Blake's art containing over 600 pieces. This past March, a smaller version of the Tate exhibit opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, drawing attention throughout America as well. The William Blake Archive, a major website created

Web sites containing information about recent Blake exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Tate Gallery include:

http://www.metmuseum.org/special/William_Blake/blake_more.htm

<http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/blake.htm>

by three scholars (including Joseph Viscomi of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who will speak October 16 at UNCG as part of the celebration of the acquisition of the one-millionth volume) has provided a collection of high-quality Blake illustrations and texts on the Internet.

From *Time Magazine* to the *New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, recent articles about Blake re-examine his place in history and the impact of his work on our own times.

All this for a man whose life and work have often caused others to speculate about his sanity. As Blake Morrison wrote last year in the British newspaper *The Independent*: "In his lifetime Blake was admired by a few, patronised by some, and ignored by most. What little reputation he had was for madness." One critic called him "an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement." Another suggested that the next time he tried to write poetry, his friends should stick him in a straitjacket.

The current revival is not the first time interest in Blake has been renewed. At the end of the 19th century, poets Swinburne and Yeats expressed their debt to him, and even though T.S. Eliot noted his "peculiarity" and "unpleasantness," familiarity with Blake's poetry grew until many schoolchildren and

others knew the lines, "tyger, tyger burning bright..."

In 1949, the William Blake Trust authorized Trianon Press to publish reprints of his illuminated books meeting the highest technical standards of the time. The reprints, many of which are part of Jackson Library's collection, were expensive to produce and were slow to be released, but are now highly collectable in their own right. Scholarly interest in Blake the artist again revived significantly in 1976, when the Tate Gallery mounted the first major exhibit of his work. Within the last decade, the Blake Trust has again cooperated in producing high-quality reproductions of Blake's illuminated books, this time through the Princeton University Press.

Not all of the revivals of interest in Blake have been scholarly. Kevin Jackson, again writing for the British newspaper *The Independent*, says: "Since at least the late Fifties, one big tranche of Blake's readership has been a rainbow alliance of beats, hippies, freaks, rockers, New Agers, spiritual aspirants, pilgrims and undefinables."

In his review of the Met exhibit this year, *New York Times* art critic Michael Kimmelman agrees, writing "from the Age of Aquarius to the New Age, he has come to serve as the patron saint of innumerable self-styled eccentrics, disgruntled and unpublished authors, flower children, fans of psychedelia, Jungians, Freudians, alternative lifestyle advocates, occultists, spiritualists, nudists, animal lovers, socialists and teenagers of the sort who read Hermann Hesse."

There are those who believe Blake to have composed music as he composed poetry. Indeed, he has inspired a number of composers. Herbert Parry's World War I-era composition, popularly known as *Jerusalem*, was composed to accompany Blake's patriotic and nationalistic poem *And did those feet in ancient time*. *Jerusalem* is now often played when the British national soccer team takes the field and has been proposed on occasion as a substitute for *God Save the Queen* as Britain's national anthem. Vaughn Williams' 1931 ballet, *A Masque for Dancing*, was begun in 1927 to commemorate the centennial of Blake's death. Contemporary jazz composer Mike Westbrook's settings commissioned for Adrian Mitchell's 1971 musical play about Blake, *Tyger*, remain among his most popular. The 1960s saw tributes to Blake from rock artists such as Jim and later Van Morrison. The recent Tate Gallery exhibition was accompanied by tributes and performances from (among others) Patti Smith, John Tavener, Billy Bragg, Jah Wobble, and Alex James from Blur.

The production of books about Blake continues to increase. Novelist Peter Ackroyd wrote a major biography of Blake in 1996, and this year Yale University Press published Canadian scholar G.E. Bentley's new biography, *The Stranger From Paradise*. Catalogs for the Tate and Met exhibits have placed Blake's images before more and more of the museum-going public, and Amazon.com lists over 700 books matching the search term "William Blake."

Of course, there are still many who find Blake's art less than worthy of so much attention. *Newsday* critic Ariella Budick says "William Blake is better remembered as a poet than a painter, and with good reason." Of the Met exhibit, she continues, "It makes one thing abundantly clear: in the case of Blake, a little goes a long ways; a lot goes a little too far."

Come see for yourself. The Special Collections Division of Jackson Library will present an exhibit about Blake entitled "William Blake: Dreamer of Dreams" from September 15-November 7.



The William Blake Archive

The Blake Archive: <http://www.blakearchive.org/> is a hypermedia archive sponsored by the Library of Congress and supported by the Preservation and Access Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Sun Microsystems and Inso Corporation. With past support from the Getty Grant Program and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

Editors

Morris Eaves, University of Rochester
 Robert Essick, University of California, Riverside
 Joseph Viscomi, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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