

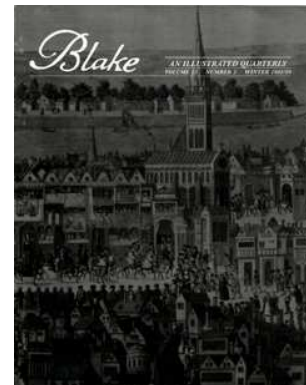
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D I S C U S S I O N

An Island in the Moon

Michael Phillips

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the visual arts, both publications will be essential. For somebody willing to be satisfied with the main core of Blake's achievement perhaps the first of the two publications will be sufficient, particularly if one has access to the 1935 Pierpont Morgan Library publication, which contains color facsimiles of the Butts and Linnell set of watercolors (only reproduced here in monochrome), and indeed of the New Zealand set, together with reproductions of the Fitzwilliam Museum drawings, many of the related sketches, and the final engravings.

DISCUSSION

with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought

An Island In The Moon

Michael Phillips

G. E. Bentley, Jr., has generously invited my comment on his review of the facsimile of William Blake's *An Island in the Moon*. The only aspect where I feel that it may be appropriate for me to do so is in answer to the questions he raises regarding the "Description" of the manuscript, as these questions may lead some readers to conclude that the edition may not present: 1) of the material that it should, or that what has been presented may not be faithfully described.

A misunderstanding appears to stem from reference to the binding of the manuscript and to knowledge of its history prior to 1978. At the time of Keynes's inspection, and later that of Bentley, the manuscript was bound together with leaves of later Van Gelder paper, upon which were mounted a proofsheets of Blake's woodcuts for Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil* (1821) and a note referring to their provenance by Samuel Palmer's son, A. H. Palmer. In 1978 it was disbound for restoration and rebinding by the late S. M. Cockerell. As the old binding was removed Cockerell made the following description of its condition and contents and of the processes of rebinding:

Note by Binder; DC6477; Island in the Moon; William Blake. Condition when received: Binding red hard grain, title blocked in gold on front board, leaves overcast very close to the text and the book sewn on five sawn cords, slips cut off. Collation—paste down and three blank leaves at front, paste down and one blank leaf at the back all Van Gelder paper plus six blank leaves at the back of the same thin paper as the manuscript; the third blank leaf numbered

1, two A. H. Palmer notes mounted on leaf 2, wood engraving mounted on leaf 3, text on leaves 4 to 12, drawings on the verso of leaf 13, leaves 2 and 3 foxed.

Leaves disbound, overcasting removed, acidity of paper checked, average reading pH 4.12, leaves deacidified with a solution of Barium Hydroxide in Methanol, reading after treatment pH5.30, the Palmer notes and the wood engraving remounted on handmade paper, leaves edged with handmade paper using heatset tissue and mounted in handmade paper frames, each mounted leaf bound separately in quarter brown morocco, buckram sides, gold lettering, the blank leaves in one binding, the thirteen bindings housed in three buckram covered boxes. (Solvent for the adhesive of heatset tissue—I. M. S.) [Signed] SMC; D. C. and Son November 1978

It was after rebinding, and while the manuscript was being photographed for the color facsimile, that it was first inspected for the edition.

As Cockerell's description suggests, the manuscript leaves were not conjugate. It had been bound as separate folio leaves in the order given, with the leaf of sketches bound out of order, before the six blank leaves. The narrow inside margins of each of these leaves, of thin and quite brittle paper, showed evidence of being broken, and at the time, I understood this condition to indicate that each leaf had previously been mounted on a guard for binding.¹ Cockerell's description, "leaves overcast very close to the text," indicates that in fact each leaf had only been "overcast"² and then sewn directly onto cords for binding. If any part of the manuscript had been conjugate this would have been noted and the full sheet preserved.

The surviving sixteen leaves contain an equal number of watermarks and countermarks.³ In this sense the extant manuscript is described as complete, in that what has survived represents eight complete sheets of the original gathering, each sheet containing a watermark and a countermark. However, in absolute terms, the "Description" also makes plain that at least one sheet is missing from the center of the gathering, indicated by the lacuna between the surviving eighth and ninth leaves of an otherwise consecutive text.

There remains the question of the other contents of the volume, as disbound by Cockerell. Understandably, Bentley associates these materials with the manuscript as they were bound together at the time of his inspection, and duly noted in *Blake Books*.⁴ As they bear upon the subject of the facsimile, a distinction was made: foremost, that no *intrinsic* relationship exists between the manuscript and the other materials that were at one time present in the same binding. A consideration was the binding itself and its history. Exactly when and for whom the binding was made could not be determined at the time, and remains unknown. What was clear, from the nature of the binding and its contents, was that the manuscript had only been placed together with the other materials some time after Blake's death.

The Fitzwilliam Museum has now been able to supply further information. The binding was by the firm of Rivière & Son; it contained the bookplate "FROM THE LIBRARY OF / CH. FAIRFAX MURRAY"; and it was in this binding that Charles Fairfax Murray presented the volume to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1905.⁵ The firm of Rivière was started in Bath in 1829, changed to Rivière & Son in 1881, and ceased business in 1939.⁶ By 1893 the manuscript belonged to Charles Fairfax Murray, as acknowledged by Ellis and Yeats in their edition of Blake published that year. Their description does not make clear whether the manuscript is bound.⁷ Nor does that of John Sampson published in 1905, which is based upon an inspection of the manuscript while it was still in Fairfax Murray's possession.⁸ Neither Ellis and Yeats, nor Sampson, make reference to the other materials. It would seem likely therefore that these materials, including the manuscript, were gathered together by Charles Fairfax Murray and bound for him by Rivière & Son, certainly not later than 1905 and possibly, specifically for presentation to the Fitzwilliam Museum.

I hope this clarifies any misunderstanding and assures those who may use the edition. It should perhaps be added that it was for reasons of economy that the six blank leaves which survive, and which were originally conjugate with the leaves of Blake's manuscript, were not reproduced in facsimile. These leaves are clearly referred to in the "Description."

¹"I saw Sandy Cockerell last Thursday, and . . . asked him about the manuscript of *An Island in the Moon*. . . . Sandy said that when they disbound the volume in which the MS had been bound, they found all the pages were separate, and had been joined together with guards—or so he remembered. Certainly, he said, he would never have cut any bifoliate leaf, though he would remove the guards, as they are often a cause of damage." Letter to the author, 23 June 1981, from Simon Rendall, who was responsible for photographing the manuscript and with whom I had discussed the condition of the separate leaves.

²"Overcasting, over-sewing the back edges of single leaves or weak sections." Douglas Cockerell, *Bookbinding, and the Care of Books*, 5th ed. (New York: Appleton, 1901), revised by Sydney M. Cockerell (London: Pitman, 1982) 336; 57–9. See especially M. T. Roberts and D. Etherington, *Bookbinding and the Conservation of Books: A Dictionary of Descriptive Terminology* (Washington, 1982) 182–3 for "overcasting" and "oversewing." I am grateful to Bernard C. Middleton for assistance in explaining the process; and for the reference to Roberts and Etherington, and to Howard M. Nixon cited below.

³See the diagram of watermarks and countermarks given in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 221.

⁴*Blake Books* 223.

⁵I am grateful to Dr. Paul Woudhuysen, Keeper of Manuscripts and Printed Books, Fitzwilliam Museum, for supplying this information and a copy of the binder's note by S. M. Cockerell.

⁶Howard M. Nixon, *Five Centuries of English Bookbinding* (London: Scolar Press, 1978) 98.

⁷Edwin J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats, eds. *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*, 3 vols. (London: B. Quaritch, 1893) 1:1186–7 and 200–1.

⁸John Sampson, ed. *The Poetical Works of William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905) 50–2.

