

Colored Copies of Blair's *Grave*
(1808, 1813): A Census

BY G. E. BENTLEY, JR.

G. E. BENTLEY, JR., (gbentley@chass.utoronto.ca) published *Thomas Macklin (1752–1800), Picture-Publisher and Patron, Creator of the Macklin Bible* (Mellen Press, 2016), with a section on Blake.

- 1 THE information in this census derives from auction catalogues and from the copies themselves when traced. They are not described at all in Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (1981), or in *Blake Books* (1977), *Blake Books Supplement* (1995), and “William Blake and His Circle” in *Blake* (1994–), except incidentally.
- 2 According to *Sale Catalogues of Blake's Works 1791–2015: A Catalogue Somewhat Raisonné* <<http://uoft.me/blake-collection>>, 644 copies of Blair's *Grave* (“1808,” “1813”)¹ were offered by 2015. Of these, only six sales offered colored copies, some of them more than once.
- 3 Robert N. Essick has provided crucial help in compiling this catalogue of colored copies of Blair's *Grave*. He believes that none of the coloring is by Blake or his wife.

COPY A (see illus. 1 and 2)

Location: Huntington Library²

Binding: Inscribed “Edward Aubrey | 1809”³

Description: 1808 quarto

COPY B

Location: Huntington Library⁴

Description: *The Holy Bible*, 6th ed. (Dublin: James Reilly,

1794) with title pages saying it was “extra-illustrated with over eight thousand prints, etchings, drawings, etc. Collected by Augustin Daly, and arranged and placed by Henry Blackwell, and extended from one to forty-two volumes. ... Easter 1892.” The extra illustrations include pls. 8-9, colored, from Blair's *Grave*.

History: (1) Collected by Augustin Daly, arranged and placed by Henry Blackwell in 1892; (2) Bought in 1918 by Henry Huntington and bequeathed to the Huntington Library.

COPY C

Location: Untraced

Binding: “*mediæval morocco, joints, vellum linings, gilt edges, the sides embossed with two of Blake's designs, symbolising Life and Death, with emblematic borders.* (Miss Moore)”

Description: 1808 quarto

History: (1) Offered in Sotheby, Wilkinson, & Hodge, *Catalogue of Bindings by the Guild of Women-Binders*, 10 December 1900 (London, 1900), lot 1, “BLAIR (R.) The Grave, a Poem, LARGE PAPER, portrait and 12 plates by William Blake, hand-coloured proofs, mediæval morocco, joints, vellum linings, gilt edges, the sides embossed with two of Blake's designs, symbolising Life and Death, with emblematic borders. (Miss Moore) imp. 4to. 1808 * * * Coloured impressions of these plates were never issued, and Miss Cardew was commissioned to colour this set. The experiment is thought to be highly successful.”

COPY D

Location: Alan Parker

Description: Title page only for the 1808 folio

History: (1) Offered in John Windle, *Catalogue Forty-Two* (2006), no. 5, “colored, clearly by a contemporary hand ... [with] a very strong connection to Blake's and Mrs. Blake's palette,”⁵ and sold to (2) Alan Parker.

COPY E

Location: Untraced

Binding: “gilt, blue straight-grain morocco, gilt edges, by [C.] Hering with his ticket, one cover partly loose, with the bookplate of Thomas Adam,” “there are a few offsets; without the Stothard prospectus; ... one cover partly loose,” “*plates washed, bleached and re-sized, slightly browned, some slight spotting (chiefly to margins) of some plates, occasional offsetting to text,*” “*inner dentelles gilt, unobtrusive*

1. Of course some of these were offered more than once; William Bateson's copy appears in seven sales.

2. Call number 54049. Robert N. Essick, “Blake in the Marketplace, 2013,” *Blake* 47.4 (spring 2014), says that “its tinting is more skillful, restrained, and convincing than the Vershbow copy. ... but I hesitate to ascribe the tinting to Blake or his wife, Catherine.”

3. Aubrey is not in the Blair subscription list and is not otherwise known to Blake scholarship. Perhaps he is the Edward Aubrey who was born in London in 1754 and died in 1827 in Canada.

4. Call number 112823.

5. According to Essick, “Blake in the Marketplace, 2006,” *Blake* 40.4 (spring 2007): 131, “The hand coloring shows some skill on the descending figure, but amateurish carelessness in the coloring of the flames. This colorist would not seem to be the same as the artist who colored all the Blake pls. in a copy of the 1808 quarto issue now in the Huntington Library.”

repairs to boards, rebacked, collector's quarter blue morocco box," 34.4 x 27.5 cm.

Description: 1813. Coloring mostly or entirely after 1840.

History: (1) Offered at Parke-Bernet Galleries, *The Renowned Library Formed by the Late William H. Woodin: First Editions, Original Drawings, Paintings, Caricatures: The Work of the Great English Illustrators and Authors of the XVII-XIX Centuries: Alken, the Three Cruikshanks, Rowlandson, Gilray and Others ... Now the Property of the Estate of His Wife, the Late Annie Jessup Woodin, Sold by Order of the Executor, Part Two*, 6-8 January 1942 (New York, 1942), lot 60, Blair, *The Grave* (1813), with the hand coloring of the prints "probably done by Mrs. Blake"; (2) Offered at Parke-Bernet Galleries, catalogue of Mrs. David Gage Joyce of Chicago, "A Maryland Lady," a midwestern collector, and others, 23-24 November 1943 (New York, 1943), first day, property of "A Maryland Lady," lot 51, Blair, *The Grave* (1808) [sic], quarto, all plates but the frontispiece [portrait of Blake by Phillips] "finely colored by hand," "probably colored at the time of publication"; there are a few offsets; without the Stothard prospectus; gilt, blue straight-grain morocco, gilt edges, by Hering with his ticket, one cover partly loose, with the bookplate of Thomas Adam [\$4000]; (3) Offered by Sotheby's, 13-14 May 1999 (London, 1999), lot 122, Blair, *The Grave* (1813), folio, "coloured in [sic] hand throughout, portrait frontispiece of Blake by Shiavonetti [sic] after Phillips, plates washed, bleached and re-sized, slightly browned, some slight spotting (chiefly to margins) of some plates, occasional offsetting to text, later blue straight-grained morocco gilt by C. Hering, inner dentelles gilt, unobtrusive repairs to boards, rebacked, collector's quarter blue morocco box, bookplate of Thomas Adam (sold in the Woodin sale, Parke Bernet, 6 Jan 1942, lot 60), [Keynes 82], 344 by 275mm, folio"; "The colouring

6. William Hartman Woodin (1868-1934), railroad freight-car builder, Secretary of the Treasury in 1933.

7. The Maryland lady was Christine Alexander Graham, whose bookplate appears in *Songs of Innocence* (A) (lot 48).

of the first plate (engraved additional title) is probably contemporary, and there are possibly some traces of original colouring in the subsequent plates. However, at least two of the colours in these plates (pink and verdigris) are post-1840, and the plates appear to have been extensively re-coloured at some time after this date." (Estimate £3000-5000) [sold for £3680].

COPY F

Location: Untraced

Description: 1813 quarto

History: (1) Offered by Christie's, *The Collection of Arthur & Charlotte Vershbow, Part Four: The Neoclassical, Romantic, Symbolist and Modern Periods*, 29 October 2013 (New York, 2013), lot 789, Blair, *The Grave* (1813), "text watermarked 'Edmeads & Pine 1802' or 'Edmeads & Co 1811,'" "all finely hand colored," "POSSIBLY THE MASTER COPY, COLORED BY BLAKE," acquired from the San Francisco dealer John "Scopazzi, 1971."⁸ "According to Martin Butlin, the present copy appears to have been colored by Blake himself";⁹ "Butlin proposes that the coloring of this copy is consistent with Blake's coloring scheme, and two plates show 'heavy areas' typical of his coloring." "Death of the Strong Wicked Man" and "The Reunion of the Soul & the Body" are reproduced, showing very Blake-like coloring, especially in the red flames. (Estimate: [September \$60,000-\$80,000, reduced by 2 October to \$40,000-\$60,000, restored by 4 October to \$60,000-\$80,000]) [sold for \$93,750].

8. According to John Windle, Scopazzi (1910-87) "specialized in acquiring uncolored maps and prints and having them professionally colored in period styles" (Essick, "Blake in the Marketplace, 2013," *Blake* 47.4 [spring 2014]). Essick continues: "I doubt that this copy of *The Grave* was colored by Scopazzi."

9. Essick and Windle are dubious about this claim: "John Windle and I suspect that the hand coloring is c. 1850 or later. The heavy coloring of flames and the tinting of angels' wings in multiple pastel hues seem particularly uncharacteristic of Blake" (Essick, "Blake in the Marketplace, 2013").

1. (next page) "*The descent of Man into the Vale of Death. | 'Tis here all meet!*" (plate size 27.9 x 17.0 cm.). Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Call number 54049. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

In the coloring, the rocks at the cave mouth are dark gray, the other rocks shades of brown and gray, and the sky pale gray. The clothing is pink for the woman at the top, the woman behind the man on crutches, the woman with a baby at the bottom, and the child at bottom left. It is green for the woman with a child behind the man on crutches and the child before the bottom woman, and blue for the boy in front of the woman with a child and the shirt of the man with clasped hands near the bottom. The clothing is yellow for the running boy behind the man on crutches and the trouser tights of the man with clasped hands.

In Blake's watercolor for "The Descent of Man" (23.4 x 13.5 cm.) the sky is blue, the rocks are brown and gray, and the figures are touched with pale brown or very pale blue (man on crutches and the woman and man ahead of him), but most are uncolored.

There is of course no reason why an artist should not make changes in the coloring of different copies of the same design, but the colors in the Huntington copy seem meticulous but not Blake-like.



Drawn by W. Blake.

Engraved by L. Schiavonetti.

The descent of Man into the Vale of Death.

'Tis here all meet!

London Published May 1780 by Cadell & Davies Strand.



Drawn by R. Blake.

Engraved by L. Schiavonetti.

The Day of Judgment.

London, Published May 1st 1803, by Cadell & Davies Strand.

2. (previous page) “*The Day of Judgment*” (plate size 32.0 x 25.3 cm.). Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Call number 54049. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

In the coloring, the marginal sky is dark blue, the clouds in Christ’s background and the wings of the Zoas pale blue, the radiance beyond Christ’s surrounding angels mustard yellow, the flames pale red, the background of the falling souls at right gray, and there are touches of pale pink on the flesh. Christ is pale purple, there are touches of blue on some humans on each side of him, including those holding the great book at left and the woman at bottom left, and the book holders at right are pale purple.