

# THE GRAVE

By Michael Thompson  
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*WHILST some affect the sun, and some the shade,  
Some flee the city, some the hermitage;  
Their aims as various as the roads they take  
In journeying through life; the task be mine  
To paint the gloomy horrors of the tomb . . . .*

Thus begins the largely forgotten eighteenth century poem *The Grave* by Scottish Presbyterian minister Robert Blair. Born in Edinburgh to a wealthy family in 1699, it is often said he published only one poem, but in fact he published three, one about his father in law, another a translation, and a third, *The Grave*, a commercial if not critical success. The work originally appeared just three years before Blair's death in 1746, but it nevertheless managed to gain a life of its own. It went through forty-seven editions, was frequently translated, and became a part of the ordinary school curriculum for children in Scotland and even in England. It was an early component of what eventually became known as the "Graveyard School," a genre in which a narrator leads the reader through a graveyard, usually at night, making comments about the ephemeral nature of human life and material wealth. Although popular in its time, the poem would likely have met an appropriate, eponymous end had it not been for a particular deluxe edition that featured illustrations produced for it by English poet, artist, and mystic William Blake.

Blake, younger than Blair by almost fifty years, died in 1827. In September of 1805, over sixty years after *The Grave's* original publication, an engraver turned publisher, Robert Cromek, chose to produce a deluxe edition to be financed through subscription. Copies of *The Grave* were not scarce, but Cromek wanted to use Blake to distinguish his version from

the multitude of others. In his first prospectus for subscribers, of which only three copies are extant, Cromeek described the proposed book as containing fifteen illustrations “from designs invented and to be engraved by William Blake.” Blake was known to be eccentric and not entirely agreeable to work with, and for this or some other reason a second prospectus was produced in which Cromeek stated that the book would be “illustrated with twelve very special engravings by Louis Schiavonetti from designs invented by William Blake”, and this is in fact what transpired. The actual number of watercolors produced by Blake is not known but it is frequently reported today that Blake was to produce forty of which Cromeek was to choose twenty for engraving and publication. Most now believe only twenty were produced.

For an artist at that time engraving paid better than the painting of watercolors, and the involvement of Schiavonetti would not have been viewed favorably by Blake who struggled economically throughout his life. A standard rate for producing an engraving plate would have been about £12, although Schiavonetti reportedly was paid £60 for one of the more complex engravings in this book, and it is well known that Blake received only £20 for all of the twenty watercolors Cromeek accepted. The merits of the dispute between Blake and Cromeek cannot be readily evaluated at this point in time since the arrangement between them is not known, but most nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentators have sided with Blake. One reason may be their umbrage at an insolent letter Cromeek sent to Blake about a year before publication, in May of 1807:

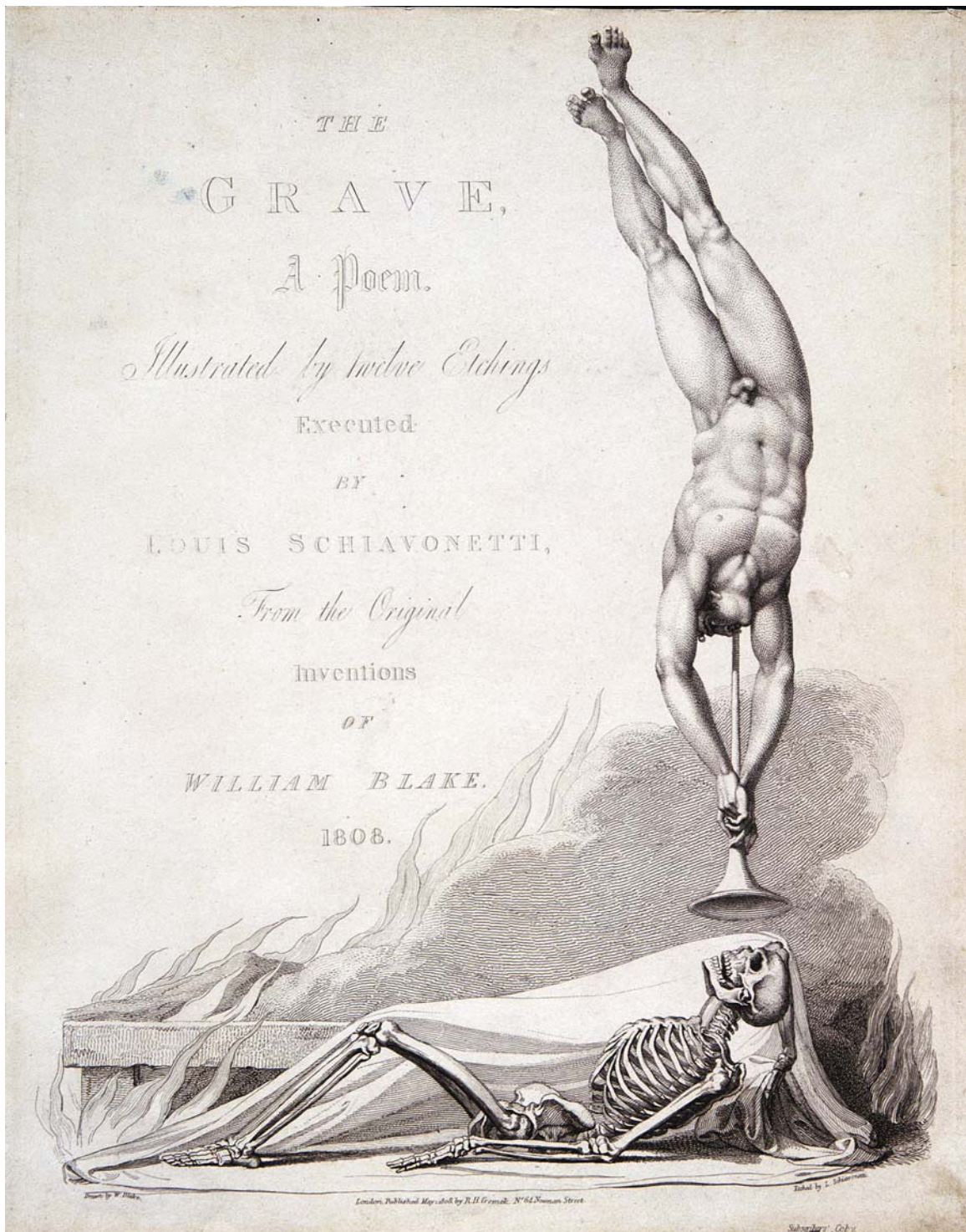
What public reputation you have, the reputation of eccentricity excepted,  
I have acquired for you, and I can honestly and conscientiously assert  
that if you had laboured through life for yourself as zealously and as  
earnestly as I have done for you your reputation as an artist would not

only have been enviable but it would have placed you on an eminence that would have put it out of the power of an individual as obscure as myself either to add to it or take from it.

Herein I have been gratified; for I was determined to bring you food as well as reputation, though, from your late conduct, I have some reason to embrace your wild opinion that to manage genius, it is absolutely necessary to starve it; indeed, the opinion is considerably heightened by the recollection that your best work, the illustrations for *The Grave*, was produced when you and Mrs Blake were reduced so low as to be obliged to live on half a guinea a week.

While admittedly a bit snippy, the letter does evince a certain ingenuousness that may indicate the dispute between Cromek and Blake grew out of a misunderstanding and not out of sharp practices. A clear answer is simply not possible based on the evidence available at present.

<< Illustration: TitlePage >>



## THE BOOK AND ITS EDITIONS

Cromek's volume was completed in July of 1808 and was by her permission dedicated to the Queen, ironically in a poem penned by Blake himself (Blair was now dead). The publication listed 589 subscribers, including Benjamin West and other prominent members of the Royal Academy of Arts in London. On the title page the name of Schiavonetti preceded in larger type the name of Blake. Based on the number of subscribers the book was probably a financial success for Cromek but it garnered little notice in the contemporary press. The one review that has survived complained that the Blake drawings contained too much nudity, apparently an inappropriate method of illustration for a quasi-religious work.

<< Illustration: *The Meeting of a Family in Heaven* >>



Drawn by W. Nichol

Engraved by L. Schiavonetti

*The meeting of a Family in Heaven.*

London, Published May 1<sup>st</sup> 1808 by Cadell & Davies Strand.

The designs made by Blake and the resulting engravings do not bear a necessary or even close connection to the poem they were to illustrate. Many of the scenes don't appear in the poem at all, such as *The Meeting of a Family in Heaven*, and others are not true to Blair's description. In *The Counselor, King, Warrior, Mother and Child*, for example, Blake simply ignored the content of the poem and placed the five cadavers in a well lit and stately mausoleum rather than Blair's "low brow'd misty vaults, furr'd round with mouldy damp and ropey slime." As one might imagine the binder had difficulty placing the engravings, so three of them were simply inserted at the end to the book. Cromeek provided an explanation, probably written by Benjamin Heath Malkin, a friend of Blake's: "[t]hese designs, detached from the Work they embellish, form of themselves a most interesting poem." The engravings show, continuing in Malkin's words, "the regular progression of Man, from his first descent into the Vale of Death to his last admission into Life Eternal . . . ."

Malkin's view of Blake's work as a free standing story may have been motivated by a publisher's rationalization, but it gained support in the nineteenth century literary market. Cromeek died in 1812, four years after the initial publication, and the engraved plates and the Blake watercolors were passed on to his widow. In 1813, another publisher, Rudolph Ackermann, bought the plates from Mrs Cromeek and produced another edition of *The Grave* which included biographies of Blair, Schiavonetti, and even of Cromeek, but nothing about Blake. This did not sit well with a coterie of Blake's admirers, some of whom were influential in artistic and literary circles. Their protests resulted in another edition of the book printed this time by Robert Bensley, one of London's best printers, and putting all of the engravings at the back of the book but in Blake's preferred order. In 1826, the plates

were used again to illustrate an entirely different book made for the Spanish market, *Meditaciones Poeticas*, by José Joaquín de Mora, whose independent work was inspired not by Blair's *Grave* but by Blake's designs. The copper plates have been preserved and according to the Blake Archive at Yale they are now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

<< Illustration: *The Counselor, King, Warrior, Mother and Child* >>



## THE WATERCOLORS

It seems apparent that Blake's designs could stand independently outside the pages of *The Grave*. After Cromek's death, his wife had been assisted by a neighbor in the disposition of her husband's property. The neighbor wrote to William Roscoe, a friend of the deceased Cromek's, stating that the estate possessed a collection of prints and drawings which included, among other things, "Blake's original designs for Blair's *Grave* with other curious drawings of his, valued at £30 and likely to sell for a great deal more if ever the man should die." While Roscoe was a collector and was listed as an original subscriber to the Cromek edition of *The Grave*, he probably didn't buy the watercolors because they did not appear in the public auction of his collection in Liverpool in 1816.

In fact, the watercolors didn't surface again until 1835 where they were sold to an unnamed buyer in a public auction in Edinburgh for £1, 5 schillings and were described in the auction materials as "A volume of Drawings by Blake." They eventually came into the possession of the family of another watercolorist, John Stannard, where they remained for five generations until nineteen of them were found in the house of a deceased relative and sold, along with a number of ordinary books, in the spring of 2001 to a Glasgow bookshop called Caledonia Books, specializing in children's books and second-hand academic material. At the time, the watercolors were believed to be hand-colored prints even though they were in a leather portfolio clearly labeled "Designs for Blair's Grave." Note well that the portfolio contained only nineteen drawings, not twenty.

While at Caledonia, where the entire portfolio was priced at £1000, two Yorkshire books dealers, Paul Williams and Jeffery Bates, took an interest in the drawings and arranged for them to be examined by a regional rare book auction house, Dominic Winter Book Auctions in Wiltshire. Advice was sought from Tate museum curator Robin Hamlyn and Blake scholar Martin Butlin. Butlin confirmed that the labeling on the portfolio was accurate and that these were the original watercolors painted by Blake and sold to Cromek in 1806. They each were mounted on a 13"-by-10" paper backing bearing a watermark with the year 1800, indicating that the mounting could have been contemporary with the watercolors' creation. The paper lining of the portfolio bore an 1820 watermark, indicating that it was made later, within Blake's but not Cromek's lifetime. Butlin stated "[a]nyone with half an eye would know what they are. They're very important." In the words of art critic Carol Vogel, writing in 2006 in the *New York Times*, the watercolors were "the most important Blake discovery in a century."

The Yorkshire booksellers consigned the nineteen drawings to Dominic Winter for public sale, and they simultaneously contacted the Tate museum in London to see if it would be interested in buying them in advance in a private treaty sale. The Tate has one of the world's most important holdings of Blake material. The Tate offered the booksellers £4.2 million for all nineteen works contingent upon successfully raising the money. This offer was accepted in March of 2001, and the museum was given five months to raise the funds, a deadline scheduled to end about eleven months before the scheduled public auction.

No object of any nature can increase in value from £1000 to £4.2 million in just a few weeks without someone calling a lawyer. In this case it was Caledonia, which alleged that Williams

and Bates had taken the watercolors only on approval and that it, Caledonia, was still the rightful owner. It sought replevin, or return, of the watercolors and £15,000 in damages. Dominic Winter removed the drawings from its auction, but the Tate continued to try to raise the money.

The Tate deadline passed in July of 2001 without success. In November of that year, the booksellers settled their lawsuit with Caledonia by agreeing to split the proceeds of any eventual sale 50/50, with Williams and Bates further splitting their share in equal proportions. The auction at Dominic Winter was back on, and everything was therefore set for the June 2002 event when an offer came from a London art dealer named Libby Howie who had previously been retained as an expert by one of the lawyers in the litigation among the booksellers. She represented a group of undisclosed investors and made an undisclosed offer, variously reported to be between £4.9 and £5.4 million, which was accepted by the booksellers, and the deal was closed.

The watercolors were now owned by an investment syndicate in the form of a family trust registered in the British Virgin Islands, although it is believed to have been controlled by financial interests in the Arabian Gulf. For the works to leave the United Kingdom they would need an export license, but unlike in France and Italy where an export of important cultural property can be prevented, in the UK it can only be delayed to give British nationals and institutions time to buy the item at its fair market value. In this case, based on evidence submitted by Ms Howie, the value was estimated by the Export Reviewing Committee to be £8.8 million pounds. Hearings were held, time was allowed, but neither the Tate nor any other British institution could come up with the money, and the license to export was

granted in September of 2005. In October, the watercolors left the British Isles for the first time ever and traveled to the free port of Geneva, Switzerland, a common clearing area for antiquities and works of art, and a country without export controls.

Outside of the Tate, the most important holdings of Blake material are in the United States, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Morgan Library in New York, the Huntington Library in California, the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard, and at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The Yale Center for British Art in New Haven has Blake material, and would have a special interest in these watercolors because it already owns the missing twentieth picture. It had been a gift to the museum from its founder, Paul Mellon, who had bought it in 1971 from a London dealer. How it was separated from the rest is not known with certainty. It could have been sold by the same deceased relative of John Stannard in whose house the others were found, or by any of his five generations of predecessors in interest.

Libby Howie has said she spent eighteen months searching for a museum that would take the entire body of nineteen watercolors in one purchase, including the Yale Center for British Art. None was interested, or at least interested in meeting her price, which presumably was still the £8.8 million used by the Export Reviewing Committee. With the newly acquired legal ability to sell the drawings anywhere in the world, and with the United States having both the largest art market and the largest number of both institutional and well-heeled individual Blake collectors, she decided to consign the entire group to Sotheby's in New York for sale at public auction as *nineteen individual lots*. The auction was scheduled for May 2, 2006.

The entire group (including the portfolio itself which was offered as Lot 20) was estimated to bring between \$12 and \$17.5 million which after accounting for the buyer's premium and Sotheby's charges to the consignor would bring Ms Howie's consortium somewhat more than the £8.8 million export price tag. Estimates for individual lots ranged from a low of \$180,000 for the title page to \$1.5 million for the most elaborate drawings.

This decision to pursue a piecemeal sale was not greeted with enthusiasm by scholars and curators. Martin Butlin, who had originally authenticated the watercolors, was quoted in the *Guardian* as calling the decision "absolutely philistine." "The seller has no regard for the integrity of works of art," he said, "as a group they tell a story." Once again a movement arose to stop the sale, but this time not by individuals with a commercial interest but by individuals with a cultural one, *viz.*, by those who thought the watercolors should be kept together for scholarly and educational reasons. The proponents of this view felt that proper scholarship regarding this new discovery could be done only if the watercolors remained together and in one place.

John Windle, a prominent San Francisco dealer in among other things William Blake materials, tried to organize a consortium of Blake collectors, without commission or fees, to buy the entire collection for \$15 million. He predicted that the market would not be able to absorb all of this Blake material in one setting, and that a number of the lesser watercolors would be bought in. In a letter he sent to many of his Blake clients he said:

Looking at the collection, there are four truly magnificent pieces that can reasonably be expected to bring \$1-2 million each if not more. Then

there are seven pieces that are estimated from \$700,000 to \$1.2 million each of which, though they are very good, seem optimistically valued at least. The final eight pieces are of lesser quality as individual items though of inestimable value as cohesive parts of the whole. . . . With almost forty years of experience in dealing in William Blake I do not believe the market can begin to absorb all nineteen pieces at once at these valuations and therefore, if we assume that at most about ten lots will sell at prices ranging from \$2.5 million down to \$750,000, we can extrapolate from that a total of roughly \$10-12.5 million for the sold items, leaving nine items unsold.

Windle characterized the collection of nineteen watercolors as the “last remaining coherent group of watercolor book illustrations by England’s greatest poet-printer-artist remaining in private hands.” Another dealer, Lowell Libson of London, agreed, stating “[t]heir importance ultimately is as a group. I think it’s crazy to sell them individually.” Libby Howie also agreed, at least publicly, but only to a point: “One would always be happier to see them together, but in the end I think it’s best to let people choose what they most like.”

Sotheby’s in its catalogue contended that the nineteen watercolors were already incomplete because the twentieth was at Yale and that further dispersal was merely a continuation of the status quo. The incompleteness could not in any event be rectified since Yale was not interested in buying the rest and the drawing it had was not for sale. This distinction has credibility in cultural property circles. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which has played a central role in the international movement to protect and preserve cultural property, recognizes a distinction between complete and incomplete cultural objects. In 1999, UNESCO promulgated a voluntary model International Code of Ethics for Dealers in Cultural Property which seeks to implement, through nongovernmental national trade groups such as the Antiquarian Booksellers Association or the Art Dealers Association of America, various international

norms governing the preservation of cultural property. The model code defines “cultural property” as any property “of artistic interest” such as “pictures, paintings, and drawings produced entirely by hand.” Article Six of the model Code provides that “[t]raders in cultural property will not dismember or sell separately parts of *one complete item* of cultural property.” (Emphasis added.)

Are these nineteen individual works or a single work with twenty component parts? The answer to that in all events will be a subjective individual evaluation, but while subjective it can be informed by a close look into the life and work of William Blake, and in particular into his role as an illustrator and maker of books. His work is significant in the history of the book arts, and it can be viewed as a singular connecting link between two distinct and distant periods, the first being fifteenth century illuminated manuscripts and incunabula, and the second being the *livres d’artistes* of the twentieth century.

## THE BOOKS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

The production by hand of medieval manuscripts with their illuminated initials, miniature paintings, rigidly-prescribed scripts, and decorative margins was changed by the printers of the Fifteenth Century into the production of manufactured goods, and in doing so they converted the entire process from a labor intensive one into a capital intensive one. Printers had to have a press, at least one or two or more complete sets of type, and an inventory of paper and ink. They at first tended to print popular works from the manuscript tradition because that was less risky, and in order to ensure its acceptance they at tended to print it in a way that made it look like a manuscript.

Walter Crane, a leading book designer and illustrator in Victorian England, in his *The Decorative Illustration of Books*, said the period of the illuminated manuscript was “a pitch of perfection and magnificence” in that it was a blend of “art in three distinct forms: calligraphy, illumination, and miniature.” While these three crafts were not of course undertaken by the same individual, they were done with the same tools and the same medium: ink, quill pen, brush, knife, and dyes on a single sheet of paper or parchment. For a printer, producing the text of a book with a typeface based on an established script could readily be done, and then the marginal decorations, the interlinear decorations, the gold leaf initials, and the miniatures could then be added by hand after the press run, and while this was sometimes done in the earliest years, it added a labor intensive process onto a capital intensive one, and the economics of the entire undertaking were not sustainable. Aesthetics soon followed suit. According to Crane, the printer’s attempt to mimic the scribe’s craft lasted until the development of more readable type, *viz.*, from gothic to roman, which led book designers to a concern with clarity rather than aesthetics. In Crane’s words: “Medieval [book] designers sought after colour and decorative beauty, Renaissance designers were influenced by considerations of line, form, and relief.”

Relief is a good place to start when looking at Blake’s work. Incunables were illustrated with wood cuts which, like movable type itself, is a relief process that can be placed in the press in the same frame as the printed text. The illustrations for Blair’s *Grave*, on the other hand, were printed with engravings, an intaglio process that works in the opposite way from moveable type, with the ink lying in the recesses of the plate rather than on the top of the image. Engravings were almost always separated from the text on a separate leaf, although

as an alternative they could be put in the text with another print run. But this, once again, would increase costs.

In his own books, Blake reunited the text and illustrations by controlling the book production process in a way that had never been done before; he wrote the text, designed the illustrations, engraved both on copper engraving plates so that they could be intertwined on the same page, printed them himself in color, bound the books, and sold them. The illustrations were colored by a water-based paint which Blake mixed himself. Copies of his books can therefore differ considerably depending on how he chose to color them. To Walter Crane “Blake is distinct, and stand alone . . . . [I]n him seemed to awake something of the old [medieval] illuminator. He became his own calligrapher, illuminator, and miniaturist while availing himself of the copper plate and the printing press for the production of his own designs.” Blake called his process “Illuminated Printing.”

His motivation for this unique approach was in part philosophical, most assuredly it was aesthetic, but it was also economic. In an advertisement he placed for his books he characterized the process thusly:

The Labours of the Artist, the Poet, . . . have been proverbially attended by poverty and obscurity. . . . This difficulty has been obviated by the Author [ Blake ] of the following productions now presented to the Public; who has invented a method of Printing both Letter-press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand, than any before discovered, while it produces works at less than one-fourth the expense.

\* \* \*

The Illuminated Books are Printed in Colours, and on the most beautiful wove paper that could be procured. No subscriptions . . . are asked . . . ,

but the Author will produce his works [when asked], and offer them to sale at a fair price.

While Blake's method of making books consciously reached back to the illuminated manuscripts of earlier centuries, it also reached forward to the largely twentieth century phenomenon of *livres d'artistes*, or artists' books. Johanna Drucker, a modern day scholar who has become one of the leading commentators on this development, calls Blake the first maker of artists' books which she defines in a complex academic way but which refers generally to books illustrated by or entirely made by artists, and intended by them to be objects of artistic merit rather than just a means of conveying content. In speaking about Blake she says:

The independent spaces of text and image exist in a dialogic relation to each other, often losing their autonomy in the interlacing of border motifs with the letters of the text, the drawn form of the regular, small writing imbued with a liveliness of touch which invariably resonates with the sinews of line which inscribe the visual forms of the image. The page is a whole, its divisions interlocked and relational, and each page anticipates and fulfills its place in the sequence of the whole.

Artists' Books as we now understand them grew out of an idea that originated in France around the turn of the last century. At that time, the idea comprised primarily reprints of classical or chic modern texts made on fine presses, using high quality materials, illustrated by prominent artists, and financed by art dealers turned publishers. Picasso, Andre Derain, Henri Matisse, Maurice de Vlaminck, Marc Chagall, Raoul Dufy, and others were involved in this activity in collaboration with famous French publishers and art dealers like Ambroise Vollard and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. More recently, artists' books have been made by contemporary artists Ed Ruscha, David Hockney, Arnaldo Pomodoro, and others. A central

tenet of what in the mind of Johanna Drucker distinguishes an artist's book from an ordinary book is the degree of control the artist exercises over the entire production process. In this way, Blake is effectively a bridge between the artistry of the fifteenth century in the form of illuminated manuscripts and the artistry of the twentieth century in the form of artists' books, and in that role his contribution is both significant and singular.

<< Illustration: *Death of the Strong Wicked Man* >>



## THE AUCTION

With the unity of control and media that was a hallmark of Blake's work, a case could perhaps be made by analogy for keeping the nineteen watercolors together. A contrary case could be made for a piecemeal sale based both on the incompleteness of the set and on the idea that ample time had been afforded for a single, unified purchase by any number of prominent cultural institutions. A definitive assessment of what in a perfect world should have been done with this remarkable cache of Blake material may be elusive, but more importantly it has become academic, for despite the scholarly outcry the auction at Sotheby's took place as planned. It was not viewed as a commercial success. Eight of the nineteen lots went unsold, only one less than John Windle's pre-sale prediction, and the total revenue realized by the other eleven, including the buyers' premiums, was about \$10 million, probably about what Libby Howie and her investors paid to the Yorkshire booksellers. It is considerably below the £8.8 million valuation accepted by the Export Licensing Authorities in the UK, but of course the Authority was valuing all nineteen works. The highlight of the auction was the sale of *Death of the Strong Wicked Man*, which went to the Louvre for \$1.6 million including the buyer's premium. The only other drawing reaching the one million dollar mark, and only just above it, was *The Reunion of the Soul and the Body*, an iconic Blakeian image, which went to an anonymous bidder. Stated Nancy Bialler, Sotheby's specialist for the sale, "It is clear that this is too much material for the market to absorb."

The dispersal of the rich cache of Blake material will doubtless make Blake scholarship somewhat more difficult, but market realities often outweigh the needs of scholars, and in many cases they do so by reflecting a broader and more nuanced cultural view. Institutional

buyers had certainly been afforded ample opportunity to buy all the drawings as a single sale, and a decision was apparently made to pass on the opportunity. In contrast, later that same year, the Huntington Library demonstrated the depth of its resources by acquiring the “Blinking Sam,” a Sir Joshua Reynolds portrait of Samuel Johnson squinting at a book. While the appraised value was not publicly disclosed, Reynolds’ portraits have routinely fetched from five to eight million dollars, and other paintings have gone for a great deal more. In the early 1990s, the donor, Loren Rothschild of Los Angeles, a member of the Huntington’s Board of Overseers, co-chaired a \$15 million fundraising campaign. Private institutions like the Huntington and others with substantial Blake holdings have access to large sums of money when an opportunity arises and when the cultural value of an object warrants making use of that access, but when it doesn’t an alternative disposition is not inappropriate.

The needs of scholars are not the only needs to be served, and the art market is in as good a position as any one individual, in fact in a better position, to weigh competing interests, evaluate known information, and allocate the objects of the art and rare book trade to their optimal roles. There’s little reason to believe that that process didn’t occur here. The first and most obvious consideration is that the drawings were prepared to illustrate a book Blake did not write, print, or sell. It was not unusual for Blake to illustrate others’ books; he had produced several hundred watercolors and forty-three engravings for Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, another of the graveyard *genre*. Blake once said in a letter to a prospective client: “I have no objection to engraving after another artist. Engraving is the profession I was apprenticed to, and I should never had attempted to live by anything else if orders had not come in for my Designs and Paintings . . . . I am contented whether I live by painting or

engraving.” While Blake may have been overstating the case a bit in this particular instance by exaggerating the commercial nature of his work in order to attract a client, there’s little evidence to suggest that his work on *The Grave* had any motivation that was not commercial.

Second, despite what many see as the internal narrative portrayed by the watercolors themselves apart from the text of *The Grave*, many of them are strikingly similar to other work of Blake’s that has been in the public eye for years. The title page for *The Grave* is strikingly similar to an illustration produced for Young’s *Night Thoughts*. A work very much like the design *Grave Personified* can be seen at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The cover of *Songs of Experience* bears a similarity at least in composition to *Counselor, King, Warrior, and Mother*. The Sotheby’s catalogue for the sale provides a number of other good examples of such similarities.

Third, work by Blake can now be seen at the Louvre and that had not heretofore been the case. The Louvre buyer, the *Société des Amis du Louvre* paid a handsome price for one drawing, but it was unwilling to pay \$15 million for all nineteen. Similarly, other works are now in private hands in Chicago, Dallas, California, and Munich where, rather than being packed away in a climate controlled storage facility (a common fate for many institutionalized works of art), they are doubtless regularly seen and admired by their new owners. These pieces may eventually end up in an institution, donated by their current owners, or they may someday become available by private sale to other collectors. In either case, important Blake material in the long run may well be more readily available, and available in more places.

<< Illustration: *The Reunion of the Soul and the Body* >>



*The Reunion of the Soul & the Body*

London, Published May 1788 by Cadell & Davies Strand.

## A CONCLUSION

Although the auction results were considered disappointing by contemporary standards, the final amount realized would nevertheless have been incomprehensible to Blake himself who no doubt badly needed the £20 he received 200 years earlier. Every aspect of the entire affair would have been unimaginable by this eccentric genius: not the amount fetched at the auction, nor the importance now attached to his work, nor the intercontinental controversy engendered by the rediscovery of these drawings. Whether surprised or astonished, he would not have been disappointed.

The entire affair is yet another vindication of Blake's enduring value. 'The *dénouement* of *The Grave* is the last day on earth when those who have died before are awakened in their graves and summoned before Christ who, in the words of the Nicene Creed, "comes again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead." That was one of the few scenes from the poem actually depicted faithfully by Blake and engraved by Shiavonetti for inclusion in the book. It could by analogy be applied to the watercolors themselves: after a 175 year period of obscure repose they were suddenly reborn to face the cultural judgment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and while they may have disappointed the purely commercial interests of the trade, they succeeded in once again focusing the attention of art historians, dealers, journalists, and collectors on the artistic work of a very gifted man.

<< Illustration: *Day of Judgment* >>

