Bibliomania: The Felicitous Infection and the Comforting Cure[1] of G.E. Bentley, Jr[2]

For fifty-six years, from 1950 to 2006, I acquired books, prints, and drawings by William Blake and his friends, such as the writer and artist George Cumberland, the sculptor John Flaxman, the book-illustrator Thomas Stothard, and the sensational painter Henry Fuseli. I felt myself to be not so much the owner of these works as their custodian. I thought of them not as "mine" but as "ours." My dearest wish was to make the collection sufficiently coherent and rewarding that it would be attractive as a whole to a serious research library.

My wife, Beth, egged me on, but she was not a collector. She is an accumulator. It's not that she buys things recklessly. It's just that, once something has entered the orbit of our household, it can never escape again. Beth's gravitational field is too strong. Oriental carpets, glass bottles, old children's books, handsome furniture, plastic bags, jade plants, beautiful boxes, scrap paper, handsome drinking glasses, and dolls; they don't so much get chosen – in our house they just seem to happen.

She only gradually discovered that she was a book-collector. She had a collection of cook-books from 1785; my favourite recipe was for Turtle Soup, which began: "Take one two hundred pound turtle." She went from reading Jane Austen yearly to acquiring contemporary editions of Jane Austen. This is not so difficult, as there are only six Jane Austen novels and only nine contemporary editions of them. Then she found that the children's books she had accumulated for

1 The paper was given as the Seventh Annual F. David Hoeniger Lecture for the Friends of Victoria University Library in Toronto on 10 April 2007. It was dedicated to the memory of my beloved colleague Peter Heyworth.

2 G.E. Bentley, Jr, is Professor Emeritus in the Department of English, University of Toronto. He has collected books and pictures of William Blake and his publishers and friends, particularly George Cumberland and John Flaxman. He has published, and is publishing, books on all of them. Those most recent and relevant to this article include *Blake Books Supplement* (Oxford, 1995), *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (Yale, 2001), *Blake Records* (2nd edition, Yale, 2004), and *William Blake: Selected Poems* (Penguin, 2006).

teaching and for lending to children-friends were acquiring a shape of their own.

From time to time it was borne in upon her that the jade plants and empty bottles were being crowded by other, more ephemeral collections. She therefore gave her collection of dolls to the Museum of Childhood in Toronto; she gave her collection of cook-books to our dear friend Kaumudi Marathe, who writes about food; she gave her collection of children's clothing (chiefly *our* children's clothing) to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto; and she gave her by-then major collection of children's books to the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books at the Toronto Public Library on our 50th wedding anniversary on 22 June 2002. By then Beth was cured of collecting. But she still accumulates.

A singular instance of the working of Beth's magnetic force-field occurred when we were visited in Toronto by our friend George Goyder, an extraordinarily sweet-tempered and successful collector. While George was here, he wished to call on my colleague Northrop Frye, the greatest critic who has written on Blake. Beth arranged for the visit and took him to see Northrop Frye one morning while I was teaching. In order to refresh his memory of what Frye had written about Blake, George borrowed our copy of Frye's *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, as it happened in the first edition of 1947. When George walked into Frye's office carrying *Fearful Symmetry*, Frye, who by then was very famous, knew why George was carrying the book. After shaking hands, Frye reached out for the book, opened it to the half-title, and, to George's astonishment, silently wrote in it "With best wishes to | George Goyder, | Northrop Frye | Oct 1, 1985."

Well, of course, that made the copy of *Fearful Symmetry* effectively George's – and we knew no one who could more appropriately have it than George, besides ourselves. And I bought a copy of the second edition of *Fearful Symmetry*.

Many years later, George died, and his notable collection of books was sold at auction, including *Fearful Symmetry* in a job-lot with a number of other books about Blake. Beth telephoned our friend the distinguished bookseller John Windle in San Francisco, told him this story, and asked him, if he bought the lot of Blake scholarship, to sell *Fearful Symmetry* to her. John said, "Beth, consider the book yours. And I could not permit you to pay for it. There is a wonderfully fearful symmetry about returning the book to its home in Toronto."

So then we had two copies of *Fearful Symmetry*.

The Felicitous Infection[3]

My first memories of serious book-collecting are from the time when I was an undergraduate at Princeton, probably about the spring of 1952. A second-hand bookshop on Nassau Street was going out of business with a progressive sale, or rather a digressive sale. On Monday the books were at full price, but every day thereafter they were to be reduced by 50%. On Monday when I went into the shop, I saw what I believed to be the first collected edition of Shelley's poetry (1847) in three duodecimo volumes, which I knew or thought to be a significant edition. The Monday-price was $30, which put it safely out of my reach. However, I hoped that no one else would notice it, and that I might be able to snap it up on Tuesday.

The next day, at $15, the Shelley seemed to be not only good value but affordable. At my food-allowance of $1.00 a day, that only meant a fortnight or so of abstinence, or perhaps a month at half-rations. But I thought that I could do better than that, and improve my diet, by waiting breathlessly just one more day.

Sure enough, the next day the three neat volumes were still on the shelf, and the Wednesday-price was only $7.50! Even I recognized that this was a bargain. But bargain-mania was beginning to obsess me. Why not have a go at an even better bargain? So I held off for just one more day.

And next day the Shelley was still on the shelf, and the Thursday-price was $4.00! Even though this was still the price of a dozen paperbacks, or four days' food, it was surely irresistible. But then, I thought, "On the last day the books will be given away." What can be a greater bargain than a treasure for nothing? – at least if you don't count wear-and-tear on the waiting spirit.

As a matter of fact, I can not remember whether I waited until the last day and walked out with the three volumes for nothing or

3 Much of the material that follows originated in the catalogue called *GEB Books: Illustrated Books c. 1770-1830 chiefly those written or illustrated by William Blake, George Cumberland, John Flaxman, or published by F.J. Du Roveray, James, John, Richard, and Thomas Edwards, Thomas Macklin, plus Illustrated English Bibles before 1830 and related scholarship In the Collection of G.E. Bentley, Jr Given by Beth and Jerry Bentley in 2005 to Victoria University Library (Toronto)*, Compiled in Toronto and Dutch Boys Landing Winter, Spring, and Summer 2000 and amplified occasionally thereafter.

whether I actually planked down four days' food money for the set.[4] But I do remember with vivid chagrin the doubts that overcame me even at this late date: If nobody else wants that pretty little Shelley, what's wrong with it?

Now, 50 years later, I know what was wrong, not with those pretty little Shelley volumes but with the other book-lovers drifting through the shop. They didn't know as much about them as I did (little though I knew) and, far more important, they did not care as much about them as I did. A book is valuable not because you can sell it again – I can't sell a book at all – and not because it is important, echoing through the literature of its subject. It is valuable because someone wants it. It tells something about its author and about the time it was printed, not merely from the words on the page but from the texture of the cover, the notes scribbled in it by owners and their friends, the smell of old paper and morocco. Some books are sturdy beggars, some are seductive sirens, but all of mine speak to me with an appeal which is irresistible.

The collection began to take significant shape when we reached Oxford in 1952 and I discovered that it was often cheaper to buy 18th-century editions of, say, *Sentimental Journey* or *Paradise Lost* than to buy new ones or even recent second-hand ones. Such 18th-century editions, in sound though not alluring condition, could often be bought for 2/6 (my weekly allowance), and there was on the Turl an establishment which called itself The Sixpenny Bookshop. Of course we bought books at Blackwell's occasionally, but the most rewarding books often came from the second-hand furniture stores in the somewhat seedy area along Walton Street. There dealers offered old bookcases which sometimes still had the books in them – and they sold the contents as if they were furniture, for the condition of the upholstery.

I often stopped in the very respectable shops of Parker's or Thornton's on High Street en route to Bodley, but I rarely bought there, often to my subsequent regret. I remember very vividly the shelf over the ground-floor inner doorway in Thornton's where there was a handsome set of the five-volume quarto Plato translated by Thomas Taylor and published in 1804 which was marked at £5.5.0. I did not have £5.50, but I would call on Plato from time to time.

4 My note on the card itself says "$7.50 set?", suggesting that I lost my nerve on Wednesday.

And every time I go into Thornton's, 50 years later, I look at that shelf and wonder who was wiser than I and bought it.

One of my greatest temptations in the book world was when Beth's brother Dave, who was then unmarried and solvent, asked if I would be willing to invest his surplus money in books for him and tell him when they could be sold at a thumping profit. I was sure I could do better for him than the banks would, which offered a grudging 3% then, and I thought about his proposal fairly seriously.

But I decided that I did not want to be concerned with books as counterfeit or surrogate money. The purpose of money is to acquire more books, not vice versa. Every time someone says, "I expect those books are worth quite a lot," I generally answer, or at least think, "They are to me." I'm happy enough to find that recent catalogues offer copies of books we own at a hundred or a thousand times what we paid for them, but I don't really much care. And those books which are worth more than a thousand dollars are something of an embarrassment to me. I'd rather not own a book that valuable – a book that would feed an Indian village or bring water to an African hamlet. But I do not throw them away when they reach that stage. And, truth to tell, we have precious few in that category.

My greatest coup during these first years of collecting was the discovery in Blackwell's of a quarto Bible printed in 1611 by the King's Printer. Now even I knew that the first edition of the King James Translation of the Bible was published by the King's Printer in 1611, so this volume, priced at only £1.10, was clearly a bargain. As a matter of fact, there was no date on the general title page, but the New Testament was clearly dated 1611. I took the book to the desk and asked if this really was a 1611 Bible and if the price really was £1.10.0. On being reassured on both points, I neglected to ask why a first edition of the Authorized Version was being sold so cheaply. I simply bought it. (Or rather, I charged it to my Blackwell's account. I did not have an account at Thornton's.)

I carried my first edition of the King James Bible home and crooned over it and dazzled Beth with it and with my own cunning. As a matter of fact, it remained for many years the oldest book we owned, and our daughters Sarah and Julia, when they wanted to impress visitors, would show them the 1611 Bible.

But it was not, of course, the King James Translation, as I quickly discovered when I did my homework on it. By what I have always thought to be remarkably sharp practice, Robert Barker, the King's Printer, continued to print and sell the previous translation even

after he had printed the Authorized Version. I am still very pleased with our 1611 Bible, but the experience taught me fairly firmly that whatever knowledge or enthusiasm I have for books is not likely to lead me to riches or fame, however important they may be in adding to our pleasure and decreasing our bank-balance.

We have always had happy experiences at Blackwell's. In 1954, when I discovered that I was not going to be drafted into the United States army after all, I went to Blackwell's and said I wished to cancel my account with them. They asked courteously why I was doing so, and I explained that I would have no money for books for the next 12 months and I wished to avoid temptation.

"That would be a shame," said they; "you just go on buying, and you can pay us when convenient."

About five years later when I was in Blackwell's I asked how much I owed them, not having had a bill in all that time, and I happened to see the page of the great ledger which held my account. It had our address in Chicago correctly, but after my name was the firm notation "Merton College," to help them distinguish my account from my father's. And below this was a note in Basil Blackwell's hand which said "Do not bill." If only I'd had the wit to hold my tongue, I could have been getting books from Blackwell's ever since without all the tedious wear and tear of paying for them. I've always wondered whether this extraordinary generosity was related to the fact that Basil Blackwell too had been at Merton.

So far as I can recall, I have never sold a book.[5] I have certainly lost a number, and I have misplaced more, and I have lent them to friends, but I have not sold one. And the nearest I ever came to selling one taught me why I shouldn't do so.

In the late 1950s I bought for a couple of pounds the first of the four *Ballads* by William Hayley which were illustrated by William Blake and published separately in the summer of 1802. And then a few years later I found the first two *Ballads* bound together (fig. 1) and bought them for, as I recall, £25, a very large sum to us. The two *Ballads* together have only a couple of score pages, but Blake both illustrated them and printed the plates himself, and they were published for his benefit – they were clearly very important in his life. And, like most of Blake's speculations, they were a financial failure.

5 An exception I have overlooked occurred in 1997, when we gave away and sold five hundred-some books to make room for others. The expendable books were novels and frivolities, such as first editions of Jane Austen.

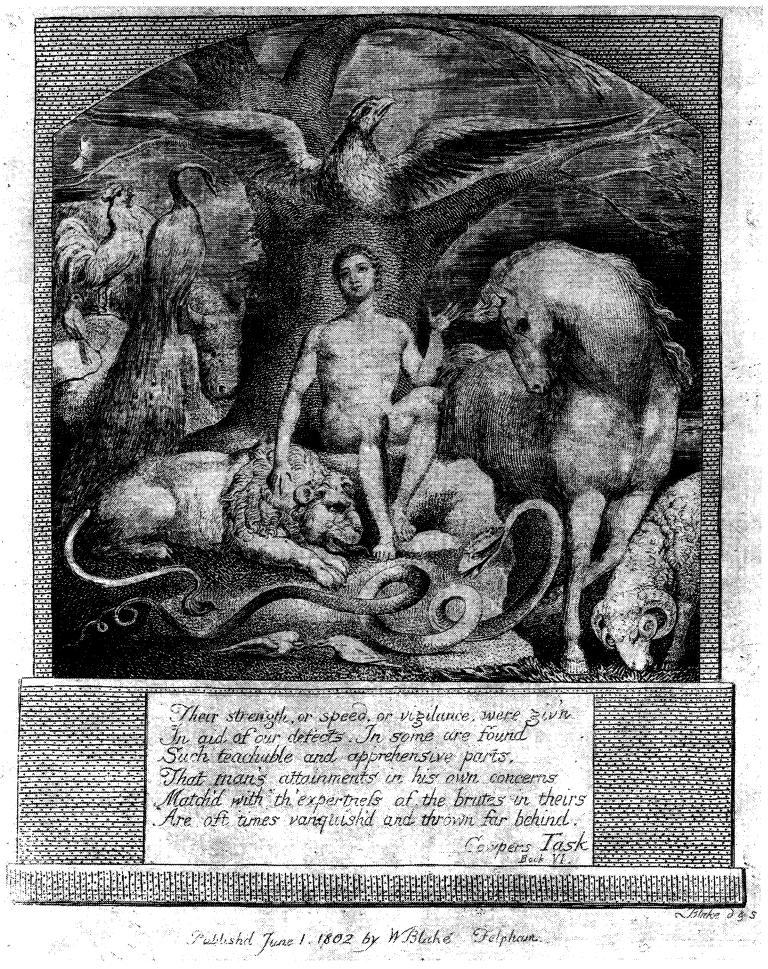

Figure. 1. Adam Naming the Birds and Beasts of Paradise, designed, engraved, and printed by Blake for the first of William Hayley's *Designs to a Series of Ballads* (1802), which was printed at Blake's expense and sold for his benefit. Very few copies have been traced in public collections: all four ballads: United Kingdom (1), U.S. (7); Ballads 1-3: United Kingdom (2); Ballads 1-2: United Kingdom (2), Canada (1); Ballad 2 only: United Kingdom (1); Ballad 1 only: United Kingdom (1), U.S.A. (1).
All reproductions are from the Bentley Collection in the Library of Victoria University in the University of Toronto.

Probably only a few dozen complete sets were sold, and far fewer than that survive today. I doubt if there are a dozen sets traceable now of the complete set of four *Ballads*.[6]

Many years later Bob Essick came to visit us, and he kindly pointed out to me that I had a duplicate copy of the first of Hayley's *Ballads* with Blake's remarkable plates. I said it was not really a duplicate because one copy of the first *Ballad* was by itself and one was bound with the second *Ballad*. However, Bob maintained that this was still duplication within the meaning of the act.

More important, he said he thought he could find a good home for it. But being a natural, that is to say devious, book collector, he did not say this right away. It was not until about six months later that he enquired whether I would be willing to sell him the single Hayley *Ballad*.

There is no one I'd rather see with fine Blake books than Bob Essick – except me – but I replied that I did not sell books, and besides I liked having two copies.

"Not even for $500?" he said winningly.

"No, not even for $500."

A few months later, Bob said, "You don't have the first edition of Stedman's *Voyage to Surinam* of 1796 with Blake's extraordinary plates, do you?" I confessed that I had only the second edition of 1806.

"Would you be interested in trading your *Ballad* for a handsome set of the Stedman?" Now, the Stedman was even then a distinctly pricey set, which is why we did not own it, and it is important to Blake and fascinating in itself for its descriptions of the flora and fauna and battles of Surinam and for the extravagantly eccentric character of the author. But I said, "No, thank you, Bob; I don't want to dispose of my *Ballad*."

A year or so passed, and then Bob said, "Beth doesn't have a contemporary edition of *Sense and Sensibility* in her Jane Austen collection, does she? How about trading *Sense and Sensibility* and the Stedman for your *Ballad*?" Of course *Sense and Sensibility* is Jane Austen's first published novel, and it is probably more valuable than the Stedman, and the number of important Jane Austen texts is finite, not to say small – but I said, "No, thank you, Bob; I think my single *Ballad* would be lonesome if it were separated from the twins."

6 Bob Essick has identified eight, one still untraced.

But Bob is not easily discouraged – which is one reason why he has the most important and fascinating and extensive Blake collection in private hands today.

A couple of years later, he said, "Jerry, I've just acquired a manuscript letter from Louis Schiavonetti which discusses his engraving of Blake's design of The Last Judgement for Blair's *Grave*. Would you be interested in having this and the Stedman and the *Sense and Sensibility* in exchange for your single *Ballad*?"

Well, Bob is an awfully nice person, as well as a persistent one, and it seemed cruel to go on saying no, and I *did* have another copy of the *Ballad*, and it would be a privilege to contribute anything to such a distinguished collection – so I said, "Yes." And by practically the next post the two handsome quarto volumes of Stedman of 1796 and the three agreeable octavo volumes of *Sense and Sensibility* of 1811 and the Schiavonetti letter of 1807 arrived at our house, and I sent off the lonely *Ballad*.

The Stedman was on my shelves for almost 30 years, and the *Sense and Sensibility* was almost as long on Beth's shelves, and the Schiavonetti is squirreled away with our manuscripts, and we are very pleased indeed with them. But every time I looked at the shelf where the forlorn *Ballad* used to live, the gap which it left seems to reproach me for faithlessness.

I don't think I'm a natural book-speculator.

Beth never repined when I acquired books. Indeed, once, about 1954, she said, in joke I think, "Jerry, you need more books." I instantly typed the noble sentiment, got her to sign it, and carried it in my wallet for years, in case of need. But there was never a need.

And she was occasionally sorely tried. In 1956, as we were about to return to North America after four happy years in Oxford, we arranged to sell our temperamental 1937 Ford called Pocahontas for £25, with a ten shilling deposit. Feeling flush with the anticipation of unaccustomed riches, I found a copy of Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797) with Blake's 43 splendid folio engravings (fig. 2). The cost, by what has always seemed to me to be a remarkable coincidence, was £25 – and I thought this was a bargain, especially when the dealer threw in a contemporary manuscript with an unpublished reference to Blake.

Shortly thereafter, the father of the young man to whom we had sold the car said he thought the car was unsafe – it was only a *little* unsafe, we had thought – and he cancelled the sale. This put in jeopardy the money we had set aside for some trifle, such as paying

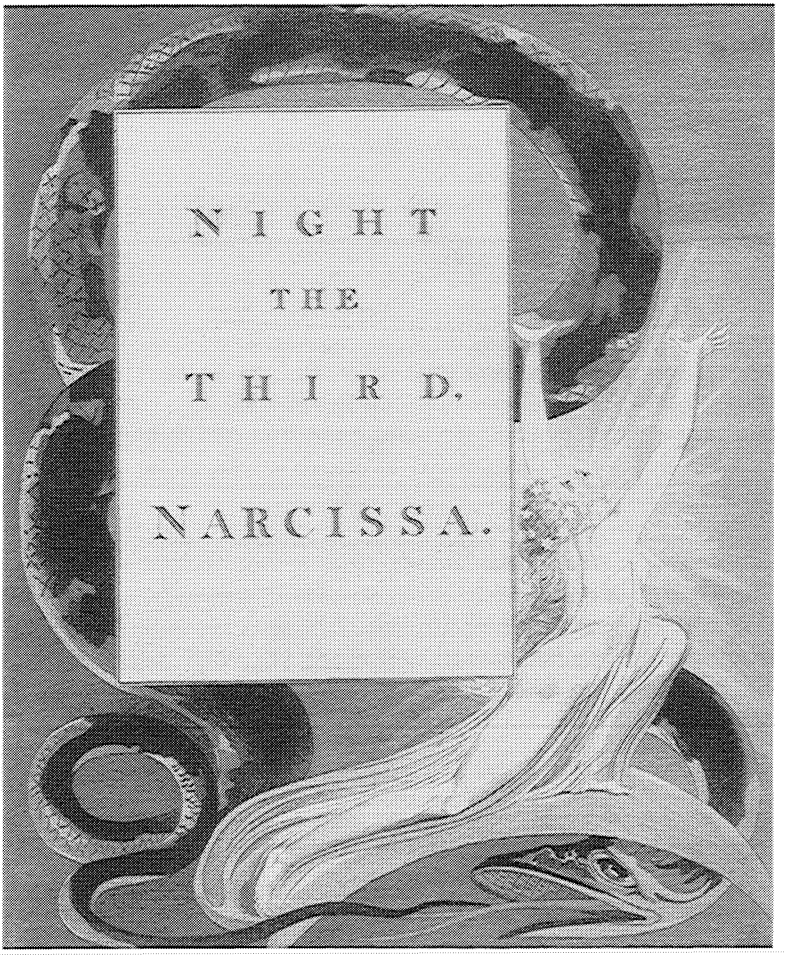

Figure 2. "Night the Third, Narcissa," designed and engraved by Blake for Edward Young, *Night Thoughts* (1797), the most ambitious commercial engraving commission Blake ever received. Illustrated copies of *Night Thoughts* have been traced in Australia (2), Canada (7), Denmark (1), France (1), Japan (2), New Zealand (2), the United Kingdom (22), and the United States (45); another copy printed without the illustrations and in original binding in Victoria College seems to be unique.

for our goods to be shipped to the dock, or making a deposit on our boat tickets. As always, Beth found the money, and, as always, I do not know where she found it.

However, there were two happy results – there are always happy results when indulging in bibliophilia. The first is that we gave Pocahontas to a lad who had once picked us up when we were hitch-hiking, and he was very pleased with it. The second is that *Night Thoughts* today is sometimes offered at $10,000 and more.

We spent a good deal of time in bookshops, partly for the pleasure of being in bookish places and always with the hope of finding something wonderful which we valued more highly than the bookseller did. When we lived in England, every second summer and every seventh year, we set aside Wednesdays for organized frivolity. We would find a place where there was both a Great House for Beth and an alluring bookstore for me. Of course we mostly came away empty-handed, but occasionally there were treasures which we could afford. And sometimes we found such affordable treasures even in highly sophisticated bookstores. In 1965 I was astonished to find in Blackwell's nine prints from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* printed after Blake's death by his disciple Frederick Tatham (fig. 3). We were astonished first because such prints were still available for sale to mere mortals, second because Blackwell's had bought them at Sotheby's for only £32, and thirdly because Blackwell's was willing to sell them to me for only £52.10. I couldn't believe our luck. I still can't. We already had another print from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* which I had found in 1963 on a pile of miscellaneous prints in Weyhe Gallery in New York, where it had been since 1931. Only a couple of score of loose posthumous prints from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are known, so we had a significant proportion of the total. And today the desirability of these prints has increased perhaps three-hundred-fold.

I was similarly astonished to discover in the very distinguished shop of Maggs Brothers in Berkeley Square one of the Visionary Heads which Blake drew after midnight for his friend the astrologer-painter John Varley. Such Visionary Heads are not rare – about 133 are known, some of them two or more to a page, a good number untraced – but of course each one is unique. The one in Maggs Brothers was a slight drawing of a crowned boy, perhaps Prince Arthur (fig. 4), which first belonged to John Varley, and it was priced at £15. I could scarcely believe it; I had never thought to own an original Blake drawing. Today its value has multiplied more than a thousand-fold.

Figure 3. "Infant Sorrow" from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1831), posthumous pull. Only a couple of score of separate posthumous pulls of the *Songs* are known, no others in Canada. Since Blake altered the design when he printed it, normally by wiping the ink from the borders, and as he almost always coloured the print, the posthumous pulls are the prints which demonstrate most clearly exactly what was on the copper plate.

Figure 4. Visionary Head of a crowned boy (?1821), perhaps Prince Arthur or Henry VIII. About 130 Visionary Heads are known, some several to a page, 19 still untraced, no other in Canada.

Two features of books and pictures which particularly tempt the addict are condition and provenance. It is of course desirable to have an old book in a condition as near as possible to that in which it was first sold, and it is wonderful if its owners demonstrably include people of interest, especially if you can create a complete provenance from its original sale to you.

In terms of provenance and condition, the most remarkable acquisition we made was of the Muggletonian Archive, which we bought from Michael Cole of York when we were living in Shanghai in 1982-83. The Muggletonian sect was descended from the seventeenth-century prophet Lodowick Muggleton, and they printed pious texts for their own edification. Over the years, the numbers of the sect dwindled because they did not proselytize, but their enthusiasm was undiminished. They continued to print books for their own edification, but, as it is uneconomical to print very small numbers of books at a time, they often had more copies than were immediately needed. The sect dwindled and dwindled, but the archive of Muggletonian books grew and grew. Eventually the last Muggletonian died, and sets of the books came on the market – never previously sold or opened or handled, in the original covers, exactly in the state in which they were first printed for the Muggletonians. In the lot I bought, there were 32 books dated from 1756 to 1857, just during Blake's lifetime (1757-1827), often exhibiting the same language of enthusiasm which he used. Indeed, the distinguished historian E.P. Thompson, who discovered the last Muggletonian and the Muggletonian archive, believed that Blake was raised as a Muggletonian.[7]

One of the purchases which gave me the most foolish pleasure was of the first volume of Thornton's Virgil of 1821 (fig. 5). It was lacking the second volume, it was in an extraordinarily modest sheep-skin binding, it was only a school-text anyhow, and it was on George Sexton's shelves marked at 10s. However, it did contain all Blake's woodcuts, which are very wonderful, and its value even then was many times 10s, though I did not mention this when I took it to the counter to pay for it. And later, in 1968, when I bought for £7.10.0 a very respectably bound set of both volumes of the Virgil

7 Thompson's theories were displayed in *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (1993). His thesis about Blake's Enthusiasm is valid, but Blake's biographical connection with the Muggletonians is now largely discounted.

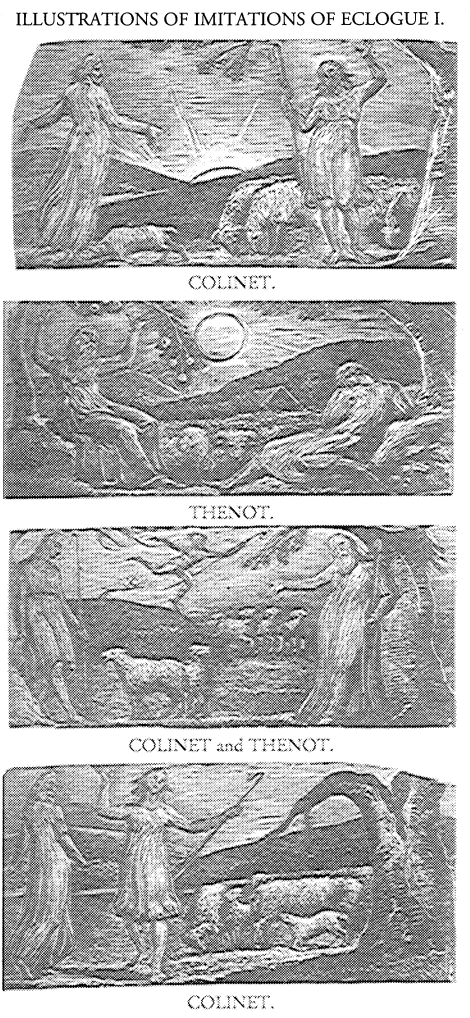

Figure 5. Blake's woodcuts of his own designs for *The Pastorals of Virgil, With a Course of English Reading, Adapted for Schools ... Illustrated by 230 [wood] engravings*, ed. Robert John Thornton, Third Edition (1821). Blake's design, like the "imitation" illustrated, transfers the setting to rural England. These are Blake's only woodcuts. Samuel Palmer described them as "visions of little dells, and nooks, and corners of Paradise, models of the exquisitest pitch of intense poetry."
Copies of Thornton (1821) have been traced in Australia (1), Canada (1), the United Kingdom (13), and the United States (17).
They must have once been very common.

which lacked the Blake woodcuts, I could pretend to myself that I had completed the set of one of Blake's most wonderful and celebrated accomplishments.

Even not buying books in distinguished bookshops can be very rewarding. I once walked into Maggs Bros on Berkeley Square and looked for a while round the ground-floor shelves with rebound sets of *The Gentleman's Magazine* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* intended for the libraries of country squires and City attorneys. Eventually I enquired politely if they had anything by William Blake, and Mr Maggs was summoned from upstairs to deal with me. (I never identify myself in bookshops until I have seen all I can on the shelves; otherwise one will be directed to what the bookseller thinks you should see, and a leisurely tour of odd corners is no longer possible.)

Mr Maggs explained politely that Blake's works are very rare and very dear, and that they didn't have any. I said that I wasn't really hoping for anything so wonderful as copies of *Songs of Innocence* and *Jerusalem* but that I would be quite content with books for which Blake made commercial engravings. Mr Maggs regretted that they had none of these either.

I suggested that Blake had made engravings for a surprising number of such books, and that some of them were fairly common, such as Gay's *Fables* (1793) and Enfield's *Speaker* (1779). This elicited no response.

I mentioned that some of them had had a certain éclat in their own time, such as Blair's *Grave* (1808), and Young's *Night Thoughts* (1797) (fig. 2), and Stedman's *Surinam* (1796). Mr Maggs listened politely but did not suggest that he could be of any help to me.

I said that some copies of the Stedman (1796) were coloured, and I had always wished to know how to distinguish the contemporary (1796) colouring from the modern colouring of Stedman, because they often looked very similar to me.

"Would you like to see examples of each and learn how to distinguish them?" said Mr Maggs. I staggered a bit (I hope only mentally) and said that I would indeed.

"Excuse me for a moment, will you please?" said Mr Maggs, and he disappeared upstairs, to return with two and a half coloured sets of the 1796 Stedman[8] and one of the 1806 edition. "If you look carefully," he explained, "you'll notice that the finer sets have touches of gold

8 The lonely volume 1 of the coloured Stedman was not available for sale because they hoped to find a mate for it.

in them, while the more uniform, less ambitious sets do not. The sets with gold are genuine, the others are modern. Notice that in the 1806 set there is no gold; there never is."

"That's extraordinarily interesting," I said, "because we know that Stedman and Blake were good friends at the time the book was going through the press, and it's possible that Blake was asked to do some of the colouring."

"How do you know that they were friends?" asked Mr Maggs.

"Well, Stedman's journal has recently been discovered, and there are lots of fascinating references to Blake in it."

"Oh," said Mr Maggs, "is that so? May I ask where you saw Stedman's journal?"

"I haven't seen the journal itself, but I've seen photocopies of it which were sent to me by the owner, Mr Stanbury Thompson."

"Is that so?" said Mr Maggs. "Would you like to see the journal itself?" Of course I did, and of course he showed it to me. And I'm pretty sure that if I'd persisted with my enthusiasm, he would have produced Mr Stedman himself – and that Mr Stedman would have proved to be not for sale just then.

Some of the most important works we own were not bought by me at all. In the spring of 1958 Beth and her brother decided to give me an extravagant birthday present. Beth found out about the sale at Sotheby's on 19 May 1958 of Mrs William Emerson (Frances White Emerson, the daughter of the extraordinary collector W.A. White), and at it she bought (by proxy) a "Proof" copy of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1826) with the prints on India paper (fig. 6) for £70 ($196).[9] At this time we had no carpet on the floor, and my salary was about $5,000, so the price they paid was pretty substantial for us – a week's salary or two months' disposable income.

And the copy itself was very fine indeed. Our favourite prints hung on our walls for many years – except when they were bundled up and put in storage, sometimes in the University of Toronto Rare Book Room, whenever we went away on leave.

Even more remarkable, because unexpected by both of us, was the gift from Lessing Rosenwald of the restrikes (1968) from Blake's seven great copperplates for Dante's *Inferno* which Mr Rosenwald owned. These are the last pulls made from the plates and probably

9 I had always remembered the price as £100, but the Sotheby record, which I have just consulted (June 2000), gives £70. Perhaps what I was remembering was that Beth and her brother each put up $100.

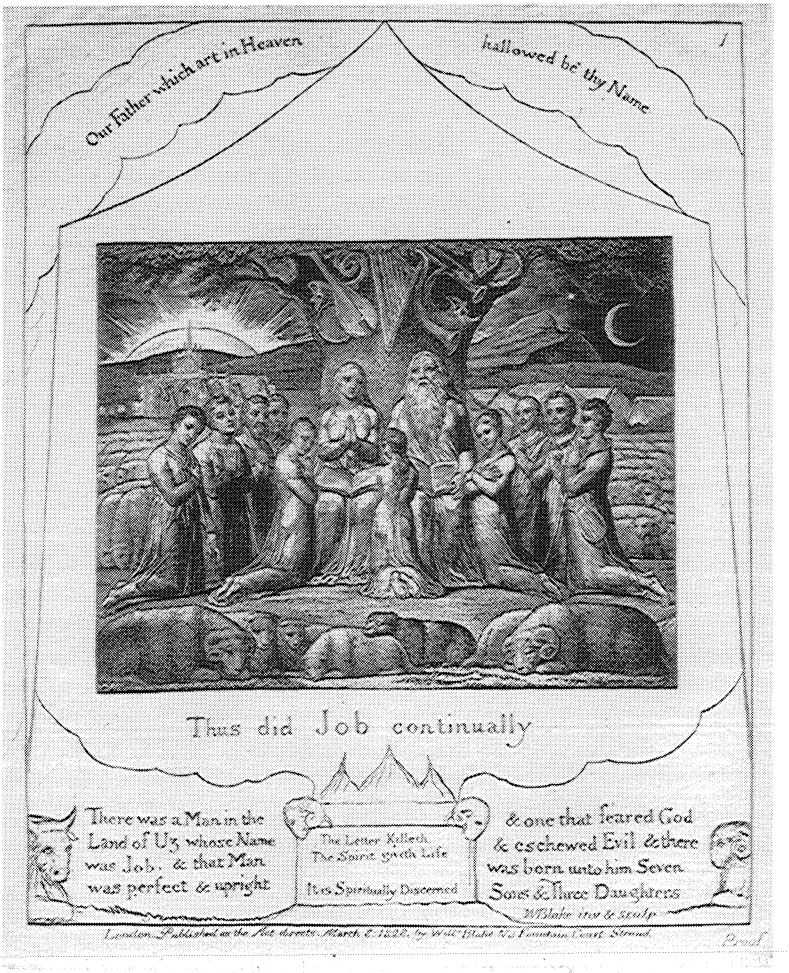

Figure 6. "Thus did Job continually," designed and engraved by Blake for *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (London: William Blake [& John Linnell], 1826), a "Proof" copy bought in 1918 from the Linnell Archive by W.A. White and sold by his daughter Frances White Emerson through Sotheby's (1958) to E.B. Bentley, for G.E. Bentley, Jr. Job and his wife here were thought by Blake's young disciples to resemble Blake and his wife.

In 1826 Lahee printed 150 "Proof" sets on India paper (like the one here), 65 "Proof" sets on French paper, and 100 plain sets on drawing paper. In 1874 Holdgate Brothers printed 100 sets (not "Proof") on India paper. Of these 415 sets, 99 have been traced in public collections in Australia (5), Canada (6), Holland (1), Japan (2), New Zealand (1), the United Kingdom (23), and the United States (62).

the last which will ever be printed. For this printing, great efforts were made to clean the dried ink out of the copper incisions, and some enthusiasts claim (probably over credulously) that these were the best prints ever made from Blake's Dante copperplates.

However, the unheralded great parcel of prints came with a curious embarrassment. There were seven prints, right enough, but there were only six designs, plus a duplicate of one of them. I did not think I could very well go to Mr Rosenwald, who had already been very generous to me in providing a subvention for *Vala* or *The Four Zoas* in 1958, and tell him I'd like another Dante print, please, and here's this duplicate which is no use to me.

Fortunately, shortly after the prints arrived, our friend Charles Ryskamp called on my father in Princeton where we were staying, and he volunteered that he would make the exchange quietly when he called on his old friend Lessing in the next week or so.

So now we had all seven Dante prints, and they too hung on our walls for many years – always a sun-free north-facing wall.

Some things came to us because of my scholarly work on Blake. When a life-mask was made of Blake in 1823, an inscription commemorating the event was added round the support. I needed to get the exact wording and spelling, but no photograph represented them satisfactorily, nor could I elicit the details I needed from the kind folk at the National Portrait Gallery, which owned the original. The only solution seemed to be to get a cast of the original, which I duly did. It lived, while we owned it, on an elegant little interior window off my study and suffered a trifle when our Siamese cat leapt up to the window, found himself with less space than he thought convenient, flirted his hips, and sent Mr Blake headlong (if you'll pardon the expression), ricocheting off the wall and onto the photocopier. All three were chipped but still hale.

Similarly in-the-line-of-work were 16 copper electrotypes of the copperplates for Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (fig. 7). The original electrotypes were made about 1861 to illustrate Alexander Gilchrist's epoch-making *Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus"* (1863), and just in time too. First the original copperplates were lost, sold for the cost of the copper – perhaps to make cannon for the U.S. Civil War – and then the electrotypes were destroyed about 1961 as no longer needed by Macmillan, the publisher of Gilchrist's *Life*. However, before the original electrotypes were destroyed, another set had been made about 1940 for Sir Geoffrey Keynes, and he gave his set in 1955 to the Victoria & Albert Museum. As electrotypes are

Figure 7. "Infant Sorrow," one of the electrotypes of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Blake's copperplates were reproduced in about 1861 as electrotypes for Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863), the original copperplates were then lost, and the electrotypes too were destroyed, but not before another set had been made. The electrotypes demonstrate even more clearly than prints from posthumous copies exactly what was on the copperplates. Only three sets of the *Songs* electrotypes are known, two in England and now one in Canada.

very exact copies of the surface of the copper, these replicas of Blake's *Songs* were of the first bibliographical importance. From them we can determine exactly the shape of the plates when they left Blake's hands – or at least how they had survived until 1861. From the V & A set electrotype reproductions were made for the Fitzwilliam Museum, and from the Fitzwilliam set reproductions were made for me in 1964. My set is the only set in Canada, indeed the only one in North America.

The faithfulness of the electrotypes to the originals, at least so far as one can tell from prints made by Blake, is astonishing. I repeatedly printed from them with graduate students, and, if we had had eighteenth-century paper, I am confident that we could have made prints scarcely distinguishable from originals printed by Blake – or at least by his disciple Frederick Tatham who printed from Blake's plates about 1831. But just to make sure that the bibliographical waters were not muddied, I required each student to write his name and the date in ink in the middle of the verso before anything was printed on the recto. And even with modern paper, the prints were often wonderfully beautiful.

Some things came to us when we were in unusual places. In 1968, when we were living at the Cité des Asphodèles in El Biar, a suburb of Algiers, Robert Nikirk, later librarian of the Grolier Club in New York, wrote to me about a curious cache of unusual materials. He had been asked to help to sell a closetful of items which had been forfeited to a New York broker for non-payment of fees or left as unclaimed. These included four leaves from Blake's *Europe* and a proof of a print designed and engraved by Blake for William Hayley's *Designs to a Series of Ballads* (9 Sept 1802). On the verso of the proof is some writing by Blake, partly cut off when the paper was trimmed to conform to the proof. The writing seems to be part of a series of riddles (hence called The Riddle Manuscript): "Love lie Girl" may equal "Lovely Girl," "Love Errs" equals "Lovers," "an Ell ['L'] taken from London is Undone [*ondon*]" (fig. 8).

Nothing like this had been seen before in connection with Blake – for that matter, nothing like it has been seen since. And at $100, one was not taking a prodigious financial leap. I manufactured an excuse to fly back from Africa to North America, ostensibly to give a lecture in Boston, and went to look at the manuscript in New York. Seeing it persuaded me of its authenticity, and so, improbably, the only Blake manuscript in Canada came there by way of New York City and Algiers.

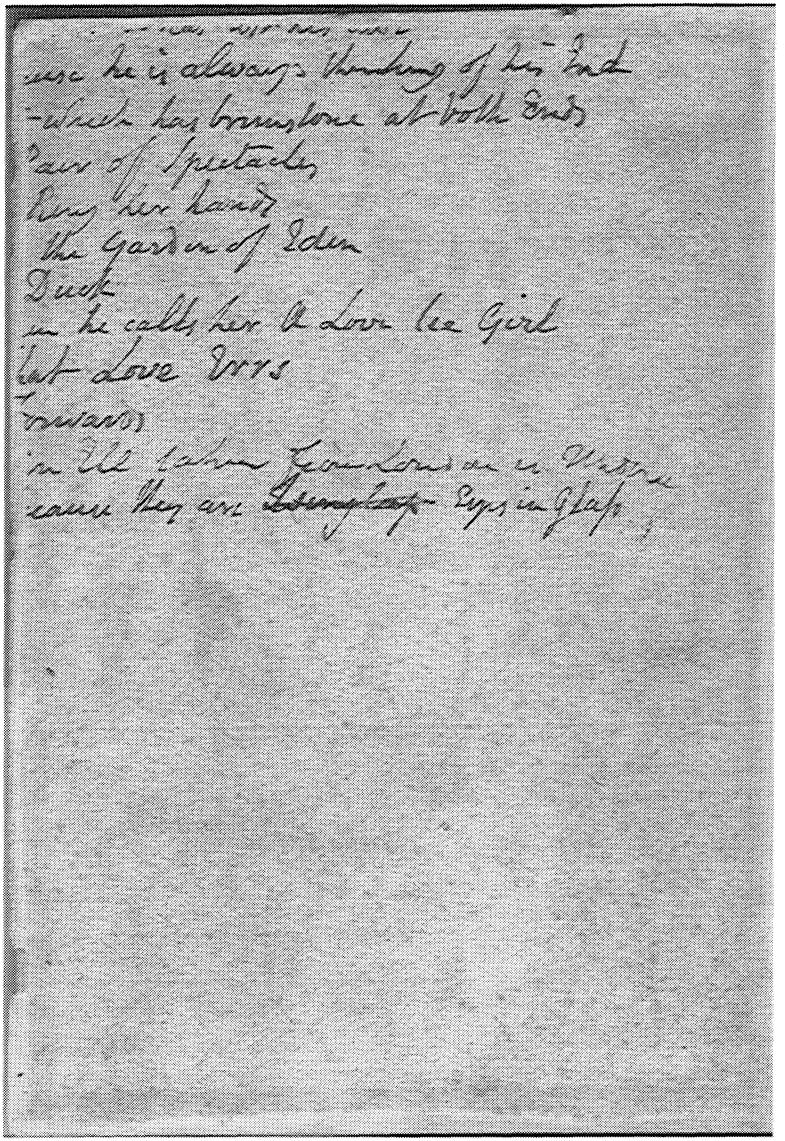

Figure 8. The Riddle Manuscript is the only Blake manuscript in Canada. It survives by chance because of the proof of Blake's plate for Hayley's *Designs to a Series of Ballads* (Sept. 1802) on the other side. It seems to represent a word-game – "Love lie Girl" may equal "Lovely Girl" and "Isinglass" equals "Eyes in Glass."

One of the most elegant places we lived was in a splendid eighteenth-century row-house in Bath, with a ballroom and columns in the bathroom. It was owned by John Heath, who collected prints by his family, perhaps the most successful family of engravers in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.

One of his treasures was an ivory miniature of Blake's friend the extraordinary Swiss painter Henry Fuseli made by Fuseli's disciple-engraver Moses Haughton. It was the custom to give to mourners miniatures of the deceased at their funeral, and when Fuseli died in 1825 Haughton made at least two of these miniatures, copying his own portrait of Fuseli which had been exhibited at the Royal Academy. One of the miniatures was given to Fuseli's friend James Heath. Beth bought the miniature from John Heath and gave it to me as an early birthday present on 23 July 1987 as we were having a memorable dinner on a narrow-boat restaurant passing through Oxford. From time to time she borrows the miniature back and wears it at parties for very special occasions, and only at home.

The miniature is in a golden locket with a cluster of pearls and turquoise on one side and a diamond on the other. Inside is a memorial quotation from Dante. Another version of the miniature is in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and we went in with Ted & Mary Silverstein to compare ours with it. In the way of collectors, we thought our painting the better of the two, but there could be no question that the locket which enclosed ours was far more elegant than the casing of the Ashmolean miniature.

Perhaps the most agreeable facet of bibliomania is serendipity, the happy discovery of unlooked for treasures. Two instances of serendipity for us were the discovery of a portrait painted by Blake's friend and patron John Linnell and a painting for the Boydell Shakspeare, part of the most ambitious plan for book illustration in England of Blake's or any other time.

On my daily walk to campus in Toronto, I noticed one day a shop selling paintings which I had not remarked before. I stopped in to see what kind of pictures they had and was astonished to find a portrait-sketch in oil by John Linnell representing Mrs George Stephen. Mrs Stephen was the wife of the attorney whom Linnell employed in 1833 to see if the property left by Blake's widow could be diverted from the hands of Frederick Tatham, who had appropriated it, and transferred to the use of Blake's destitute sister Catherine. Linnell was a very fine portrait-painter, and the painting was worth far more as a piece of art than the $50 asked for it – and of course it

was worth even more to me as an enthusiast and scholar of Blake and Linnell. I wrote a cheque for it on the spot and carried the painting home in triumph.

It proved to be the best cultural bargain I ever made, for the shop never cashed my cheque, and by the time I noticed this they had gone out of business, leaving not a wrack behind. A treasure for nothing is real serendipity.

In December 1978 I was in New York for some tedious conference; it must have been an important conference, because Bob Essick was also there from Los Angeles, and Bob hates to travel. Bob and I played hookey from some of the papers and went round to bookshops, as we often did. At the House of El Dief I saw a large oil by Henry Tresham which I recognized as having been painted for the Boydell Shakspeare about 1799. The project was of major cultural importance, the prints made for it were often wonderful, and Blake too was involved with the project. It seemed irresistible, despite the fact that I collected books, not pictures.

However, the price for Henry Tresham's *Antony and Cleopatra* was significant, and I waited until I got back to Toronto to consult Beth before acting. As usual she was sympathetic to my enthusiasm, and I telephoned the House of El Dieff as soon as possible to order it. I did so just in time, for shortly after they received my order they received another from Bob Essick. When Bob discovered that I had bought the Tresham, he said that if I ever thought of disposing of it he would like to hear of it.

When the Tresham was hung on our living-room wall, properly spotlighted, Beth and I decided that it contained a code identifying the subject. Cleopatra, who is leaning over Antony to put on his helmet, forms the left side of the letter "A," Charmian on the right side forms the other upright of the letter "A," and Cleopatra's arm forms the cross bar. And the curve from the servant at Antony's foot to Charmian at the top forms the letter "C," so that the subject is identified as "A" and "C" for *Antony and Cleopatra.* This is the kind of criticism which can be tolerated only in a proud owner or a theoretical critic. And at least it's harmless.

We looked especially for works connected with Blake's intimate friends "Dear Cumberland" and John Flaxman, his "Dear Sculptor of Eternity." We bought their books when the opportunity arose, but the most remarkable opportunity was when in 1971 we were offered the George Cumberland Archive. This included (1) his manuscript biography of Horne Tooke of about 1823 with "original Lett.^{rs} in order

of Date [*1798-1811*] from Jn. H. Tooke &c."; (2) his Commonplace Book (1789-1800), including notes about contemporaries such as Coleridge and Wordsworth, poems, sketches, a farce, and "Blakes Instructions to Print Copper Plates"; (3) "Happiness: A Practical Poem"; (4) "The Emigrants or A Trip to the Ohio: A Farce"; (5) "The Reformed or The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar" Part 2 (?1800);[10] and (6) his Sketchbook, with 265 mounted sketches.[11] The Archive was offered to us in June 1971 by E.M. Lawson & Co, and we unhesitatingly bought it with the first royalties of *Blake Records* (about $900) and a contribution from Beth ($300). This is the only significant collection of Cumberland's manuscript writings aside from his very voluminous letters in the British Library Department of Manuscripts. No study related to this prolific polymath can safely ignore the Cumberland Archive.

To celebrate my retirement, Beth bought for me in 1995 the charming card of George Cumberland designed and engraved by Blake, the last work he completed (1827). It came from John Windle and was adapted for me by our extraordinary friend Steve Nachmanovich, substituting my name for Cumberland's; it appears thus on the title page of *Blake Records*, Second Edition (2004).[12]

The most important and the most exciting "book" we attempted to buy was *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* copy M, which we were told, long before the catalogue came out, would be offered with the Rinder collection at Christie's in November 1997. Copy M had last been reported as part of the Linnell Collection when it was sold in 1918 along with copy L.

Copies L and M of *The Marriage* are rather magnified by being called "copies," for they each consist of only three plates,

10 First published in *The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar: An African Tale in Two Parts: Part 1 The Sophians (Printed in 1798 and 1810), Part 2 The Reformed (Manuscript of c. 1800)*, ed. G.E. Bentley, Jr (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

11 See G.E. Bentley, Jr, *A Bibliography of George Cumberland (1754-1848): Comprehending His Published Books (1780-1829) and Articles (1769-1847) and His Unrecorded Works in Manuscript Including a Novel (?1800), a Play (?1800), a Biography (?1823), a Long Poem (1802-3), and Works on Art (?1788, ?1816, ?1820)* (New York and London: Garland, 1975).

12 G.E. Bentley, Jr, *Blake Records: Documents (1714-1841) Concerning The Life of William Blake (1757-1827) and His Family, Incorporating Blake Records (1969), Blake Records Supplement (1988), and Extensive Discoveries Since 1988* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2004).

pl. 25-27, printed on three sides of a folded leaf. However, these plates constitute the whole of "A Song of Liberty." It seems possible that "A Song of Liberty" was designed as an independent work, to appear as a pamphlet, perhaps the earliest etched part of what became *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.* Other parts of *The Marriage* may have been designed as independent four-page units, but copies L and M are the only ones to survive in this form.

Copies L and M are important, therefore, as perhaps the first steps in creating *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* before it got its name. Each of them is a kind of trial proof with important minor variants from the published version. Further, copy M lacks the Chorus at the bottom of pl. 27 which appears in copy L and in all copies of the published version. For most of Blake's works, trial proofs are rare or unknown.

Copy M of *The Marriage* had disappeared for almost 80 years. Our only knowledge of it came from the Christie catalogue of 15 March 1918. Copy L had been bought through the dealer Tregaskis by Frank Rinder at the Linnell sale in 1918, and I saw it in 1964 in the collection of Rinder's daughter Mrs Ramsay Harvey. It was offered at Christie's on 30 November 1993, Lot 1 (estimate: £8,000-£10,000) and sold for £32,200 (plus commissions) to John Windle for Robert N. Essick.[13]

However, nothing more was known of copy M after it was bought at the Linnell sale (Lot 197) by Tregaskis, who also bought copy L (Lot 198). The suspicion that Tregaskis had sold copy M with copy L to Frank Rinder was belied by the fact that Rinder's daughter knew nothing of copy M in 1964.

So the mystery stood when, in the spring of 1997, John Windle looked through a copy of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* which had been brought to Christie's (London) with a consignment of furniture for sale. Tucked into the covers of *Job*, he found the single folded leaf of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* copy M, with pl. 25-27, "A Song of Liberty." Doubtless he drew this to the attention of Bob Essick, but Bob already had the almost identical copy L and didn't think he should presume to own *all* the known proofs of "A Song of Liberty."

13 It was first reproduced by Robert Essick in his article, "Representation, Anxiety, and the Bibliographic Sublime," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59.4 (1996): 525, 527.

Of course Beth and I were enormously excited at the prospect. We owned commercial engravings by Blake, such as Job and Dante; and a trifling Blake manuscript, the Riddle Manuscript; and some posthumous pulls from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. However, we owned none of Blake's writings printed by his own hand.[14]

If copy L cost £32,200 (c. $75,000 Canadian, counting auction-house and dealer's fees), how much would copy M cost four years later? The estimate for copy M was £10,000-£15,000, rather more than that for copy L (£8,000-£12,000), and copy L had sold for £32,200 (plus commissions). To us copy M seemed more interesting than copy L because of unique features, such as the blank space in which the Chorus was to be etched. Would others agree and bid the price to more than the £32,200 for copy L?

We scratched our heads, and we emptied our piggy-banks, and we got a letter of credit for $100,000, and we contemplated mortgaging the house, and we evaluated our degree of acquisitiveness (chiefly mine, I fear), and we searched (or perhaps chloroformed) our consciences – and we decided that we should have a go. We concluded that we could save on the dealer's fee of 10-15% by bidding in person (which would easily save the cost of a trans-Atlantic fare), and this would enable Beth to examine several other works in the sale on which I needed an expert opinion. And she bought another minor work at the sale for us.

Then nice John Windle rang from San Francisco to say that he would be at the sale and could he be of service to us? Beth said that she would be there to bid on *Marriage* (M), and John exclaimed with pleasure at the prospect of seeing her but lamented the possibility that he might be bidding against her. He had a commission of $50,000 (U.S.) for *Marriage* (M) from a client who liked prints but didn't really collect Blake. If, however, we were interested in *Marriage* (M), he thought that we would be far more suitable possessors of it than his client, and, if we would authorize him to go just a trifle beyond $50,000 (U.S.), he might persuade his client to turn her attention elsewhere. He also said that there were tricks of the trade at an auction with which an outsider was unlikely to be familiar, and he thought that he could be of real service to us and perhaps even save us some money.

14 William and chiefly Catherine Blake had printed the plates to Hayley's *Designs to a Series of Ballads* (1802) and his *Cowper* (1803) which we owned.

Needless to say, we were unfamiliar with diplomacy at this level, but we like John very much and trust him. Therefore, after a sleepless weekend of examining credits and consciences, Beth agreed to commission John with a bid of just enough over $50,000 (U.S.) to justify him in assisting us. But we also decided that she should go to London so that she and John could concert strategy on the spot and she could authorize him to go even higher than $50,000 (U.S.) if necessary. (Beth always bids more than she has been authorized to do – always with delightful results.)

So she flew off to London, carrying with her a bulky silk handkerchief containing her early editions of Jane Austen for sale.[15] She went round to some of the chief booksellers with her parcel, and they became increasingly enthusiastic and generous in their offers. (I fear she may have given the impression that she was testing the waters for the possible sale of our Blake collection.) And they sometimes offered to help her to carry her parcel to the next bookseller on whom she was calling.

The nicest book-folk she encountered were at Maggs Bros, where she found John Manners, an old friend whom we had first met at Blackwell's and who had worked subsequently at Quaritch's (I think) and at Marlborough Rare Books. He welcomed her cordially and took her to lunch, and there they were joined by Edward Maggs and, by an extraordinary coincidence, his guest John Windle.

Beth and John greeted each other as old friends but gave no hint that they had common business on the morrow. At lunch, Edward Maggs happened to mention that he had been intimidated by the great collector George Goyder, and Beth protested, "You can't have been intimidated by George; he's a sweetie." She said, however, that in the past she had been intimidated by Edward Maggs. Mr Maggs exclaimed in horror at the thought that anyone could be intimidated by him. They agreed that if Edward wouldn't be intimidated any more by George Goyder, Beth wouldn't be intimidated by Edward Maggs.

Next day at the sale Beth was of course all a-twitter. To focus her attention, she carefully wrote in her catalogue the buyer and price after each item was sold. However, when the auctioneer approached Lot 166, her hand began to falter, and she frankly gave up trying.

15 A few of the early Jane Austens had already gone to the University of Toronto Rare Book Room. The remainder fetched £4,800.

And then, just before Lot 166 was to be sold, to her horror she saw John Windle get up and walk casually down the aisle, as if he were going to the loo. As the auctioneer asked for a bid on Lot 166, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* copy M, the only copy of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* still in private hands aside from copy L sold in these rooms four years ago, John turned round casually as if in surprise and indicated that he was interested in making a bid – from the back of the hall where most of his friends among the dealers could not see him unless they turned round.

It is often understood that the lower estimate, in this case £10,000, is the lowest price for which the auctioneer will sell the work, though the bidding usually begins below this so that the serious bidders can get a running start.

To John's great pleasure, and Beth's astonishment, he bought it for her – and before the sale was over she had it in her silk handkerchief.

They returned to Maggs Brothers, where John Manners felicitated them, congratulating them on being remarkably cool customers: "We had no idea that you were working together." And he asked, "What does Jerry think of your triumph?"

"He doesn't know yet; I haven't had time to call him."

"Well, call him right now; here's the phone."

So she did, and I of course was overwhelmed. However, she thought it would not be discrete in front of John Manners to mention the price, though doubtless he knew it already. Within the hour I had an e-mail message from Bob Essick congratulating me on Beth-&-John's success and on the extraordinary modesty of the price – a price which I still didn't know.

Indeed, it was not until dinner time in London that Beth telephoned again to say that she had got *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* copy M for only £9,000 (plus commissions).

I told her to go spend the balance of her commission on some trinket for herself.

I should rather have told her to turn in her airline ticket, for all by herself she was flying so high, even after she got back to Toronto, that she did not need any old airplane to cross the Atlantic. She could have done it all by herself, powered by pure exhilaration.

When the prints arrived in Toronto, we found that the space at the bottom of the copperplate of pl. 27 was not left blank for the Chorus; the Chorus was already there. When the copperplate was printed, the bottom of pl. 27 was carefully left un-inked, so that the

design and the "Chorus" would not show beside the text at the top. However, the plate-and-paper were passed through the rolling press under such pressure that, in the "blank" space, the design and a little bit of the writing were faintly but clearly visible in a sharply raking light as indentations. Previously the 1918 catalogue-description of the prints as lacking the design and "the 8-line Chorus at the end" had been understood to mean that they had not yet been etched. Examination of the print itself (fig. 9) made it plain, at least to the eye of faith, that the Chorus was present then but that Blake (or whoever inked the plate) decided not to print it.[16]

Many details of Blake's methods of composition and printing became clear when we examined *Marriage* copy M. For one thing, the top and right margins of the paper were still uncut – deckled – and the bottom and left edges are slightly crooked as if cut with scissors – a knife would surely have been drawn along a straight edge as of a ruler. The paper is not quite rectangular – it is 24.3 cm wide at the bottom and 23.8 cm at the top, and the height is 20.0 at the right and 19.6 at the left. The leaf is folded not quite in the middle. The paper was not prepared very carefully. There are no stab holes, so it was never sewn with other leaves. Perhaps Blake still thought of pl. 25-27 as an independent work – the text is perfectly coherent without the rest of what we now think of as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*

The printing was more careful: pl. 25-26 are carefully registered at top and bottom, and pl. 27 is pretty carefully registered with pl. 26 – it is very slightly higher.

Blake was still adjusting the text and designs when he made copy M. On pl. 25, line 6 in copies L and M reads "And weep and bow thy reverend locks!", but in all other copies the last five words are omitted. When these surface (relief) letters were etched out, they were not replaced with flourishes to fill the empty space, though every other such space is so filled. The erasure on the copper had to be done extremely carefully, for, in the erased "thy" (l. 5), the riser of the "h" is on the same level as the descender of the "y" in "eternity" (l. 4), and the ornamental descender of the "y" in the same "thy" actually touches the riser in the "h" in "hands" (l. 7), and the riser of the "k" of "locks" (l. 6) overlaps the descender of the "g" of "falling" (l. 7).

16 For reproductions of it, see *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 31 (1998): 16, 139, 144.

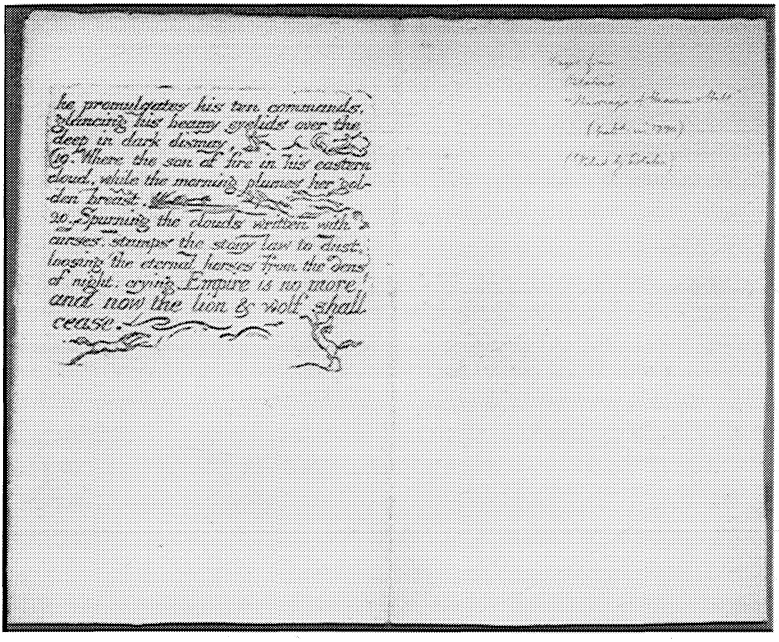

Figure 9. *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (?1790) (M) pl. 27, showing where the portion at the foot with the "Chorus" was left un-inked but visible as faint embossing:

Let the Priests 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 letchery call that virginity, that wishes but acts not!

For every thing that lives is Holy

Between the rearing horses and below them at the bottom of pl. 27, where the eight-line Chorus appears in all other copies, there is no ink. However, in sharply-raking sunlight – but not in artificial light – the word "Chorus" is visible in indentation and fragments of other lettering – the "dl" of "deadly" and the exclamation-point after "not!" in the seventh line. These ghost-letters mean that the bottom of the page was *not* masked by a piece of paper, for this embossing would scarcely show through a layer of paper. Probably the ink was carefully wiped off the bottom of pl. 27 before printing. For instance, the "C" of "Chorus" is inked at the top but only embossed at the bottom.

The acquisition of *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* copy M revealed details of Blake's work as author, artist, and printer which are not visible in any other known copy.

In time, Beth became as infected with bibliophilia as I was. In the 1990s, when she began to collect children's books seriously, she regularly bought more books than I did, and often she paid as much as I did. Because children's books are small, often tiny, she usually got more titles than I did, though I got more pages and paper.

Many of the Blake books were bought in the cherished company of Bob Essick, Giles Barber, and of course Beth, and many were bought from or through John Windle (of San Francisco) and Dena Taylor (of Toronto). The condition of the books is, more often than I can contemplate with equanimity, frequently less than perfect, in tattered covers, with boards loose or missing, half-titles absent, plates or even whole sections lacking. These forlorn cripples and amputees were often the best copies I felt we could afford, and sometimes I thought that if I did not buy this copy I would never see another one. I do not regret buying them, but I wish they were better.

When we began collecting, our resources were very humble; I had chiefly my allowance of 2/6 a week (about 35¢), though I must confess that Beth could produce surprising sums of cash from sources I never understood, on occasions – very rare occasions – as much as £5 ($14) at a time. But over the years, the most tempting items were beyond my reach, often, of course, far beyond my reach. At first I could buy a fair amount, but only because the books I wanted were pretty easily available, and no one else wanted them. But after 50 years, fewer and fewer of my desiderata or unexpected treasures turn up.

And eventually we had so many books that I could not always lay my hands promptly on the one I needed. This was partly because the books were shelved first by beauty – handsome sound bindings went in the display shelves in the ground-floor livingroom, tired outcasts

rose to my third-floor study – so one had to remember the condition of the binding in order to know where to look for the book. They were also shelved by size – folios with folios, duodecimos with duodecimos – so one had to remember the size as well. If we had more than one edition of the same book, say Stedman's *Surinam* (1796, 1806), they might be on different floors. And if the book had a childish aspect, such as [Jane & Ann Taylor's] *City Scenes, or A Peep Into London For Children* (1818, 1828) with Blake's "Holy Thursday" from *Songs of Innocence*, it might quietly turn up among children's books in Beth's second-floor study. More than once I spent days looking for a book I knew I had. And, I regret to say, more than once when we were in England and far from my catalogue I bought a copy of a book we already had in Toronto.

The collection was getting out of control, apparently taking on a life of its own.

Further, the financial implications of the collection were troubling. Most of the books, of course, had maintained a steady commercial value. Works bought second hand in, say, 1956, for £2 were probably worth a full $5 today, though most books bought new had probably lost resale value. But some works had multiplied in market value very alarmingly. A few had increased in public price ten- or a hundred-fold, and some by a thousand-fold (see the Appendix). I did not at all like owning works of such value.

And I certainly did not like the idea of insuring them. I asked Bob Essick, whose collection is worth many times what ours is, what he did about insurance, and he said, "Jerry, you've been buying books for a long time. You should know that you can afford either to buy books or to insure them. Nobody can afford to do both."

Collectors are a strange breed; or perhaps they suffer from a curious affliction. Some seem to collect for the sake of collecting. We had a friend who collected Blake with extraordinary enthusiasm and comprehensiveness. He also ran in marathons. And suddenly he ceased to collect Blake, sold his collection – some of it to us – and began collecting running shoes. Another collecting friend turned from buying Blakes to collecting Australian detective stories and then Australian sea-shells, especially those which twist counter-clockwise. At least I, as a Blake collector, could pretend that the Blake collections supported my work rather than, or perhaps in addition to, supporting my addiction.

The Comforting Cure

The obvious cure for the addiction was to get someone else to take the books and prints and manuscripts and busts and drawings and paintings and periodicals off our hands, to shift the responsibility for preserving them for posterity to someone else. And the only way to avoid the allegation that there was an aspect of personal aggrandizement in the collecting was to give them to a public collection, a research library or a serious art gallery.

Beth had had happy experiences with gifts to the Museum of Childhood and the Royal Ontario Museum and the Bata Shoe Museum and especially with The Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books of the Toronto Public Library, where her children's collections went. Indeed, Leslie McGrath of the Osborne Collection had become a dear friend; it was she who suggested that the gift to the Osborne should be celebrated on our Golden Wedding Anniversary.

So we approached Professor Robert Brandeis, Librarian of Victoria University in the University of Toronto, and found that he was just as enthusiastic and sympathetic as Leslie McGrath – indeed, on our last wedding anniversary we took them out to lunch together.

The Victoria Library is a wonderfully appropriate place for the Blakes. For one thing, it has the voluminous archives of Northrop Frye and vigorously sponsors publication of his writings both published and in manuscript. For another, it has one of the world's great collections of the works in manuscript and print of Blake's contemporary Samuel Taylor Coleridge. And for another, it has a major collection of Erasmus, to which our Bibles and religious works are at least distantly related. Victoria College has for many years collected Blake, but this consisted largely of acquiring the handsome and expensive facsimiles of the Blake Trust. We could provide original Blake materials and peripheral Blake scholarship which were otherwise very thin on the ground in the Victoria Library.

Best of all, rather than being regarded as bibliophilic wastrels or commercial speculators, we might be thought of as public benefactors. Fancy indulging an obsession, a fairly harmless obsession, and being praised for it. What could be a more comforting cure?

APPENDIX

Absurd Increases in Commercial Value

TITLE	PURCHASE PRICE	VALUATION (Canadian $)	MULTIPLIER
Songs electrotypes (1861)	Gift	$ 28,000	∞
Dante (1968)	Gift	$ 29,500	∞
Marriage of Heaven and Hell (M) (1790?)	£ 9,000	$165,000	7
Cumberland card (1827)	$ 3,500	$ 43,000	11
Cumberland Archive	$ 1,519	$ 39,500	25
Young, *Night Thoughts* (1797)	£ 20	$ 15,000	260
Illustrations of the Book of Job (1826)	£ 70	$111,500	500
Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1831)	£ 32	$ 50,000	560
Muggleton Archive (1756-1857)	$ 322.50	$ 25,500	770
Visionary Head (?1821)	£ 15	$ 55,500	1,250
Riddle MS	$ 100	$206,500	1,850
Hayley, *Designs* (1802)	£ 25?	$122,500	2,200
Thornton's Virgil (1821)	10/6	$ 25,000	11,600

SOMMAIRE

Collectionner des livres, des papillons ou des bouteilles est certes un passe-temps agréable et anodin mais peut cependant devenir une manie si l'on s'y adonne de façon irréfléchie. L'auteur relate sa propre expérience dans le domaine de la bibliophilie devenue une marotte en décrivant les nombreux volumes se rapportant à William Blake tous plus importants et coûteux les uns que les autres ainsi que les albums qu'il a acquis avec la collaboration de son épouse, E.B. Bentley. Il donne comme prétexte qu'il est d'abord et avant tout un conservateur et non un collectionneur proprement dit. Il propose comme remède de se départir de ses trésors au profit d'une collection publique, et par ce geste il fera l'effet d'un mécène.