

**"A DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE"
ADVERTISEMENT (1809)**

COPY REPRODUCED HERE: Copy A (Glasgow University Library), the only copy known.

LEAF SIZE: 13.8 x 16.5 cm.

WATERMARK: None

HISTORY: (1) The advertisement was mounted on a sheet of paper watermarked 1820 which was hinged to a stub and bound by "J. LEIGHTON. BREWER STREET" by 1830 (when John Leighton died) with *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809) Copy O in half red morocco over patterned and stamped red cloth with "BLAKE'S CATALOGUE", "LONDON/1809" on the spine, the top edge gilt, probably for Blake's friend and chief patron Thomas Butts, for whom it was sold posthumously by Foster & Son, London, 29 June 1853, Lot 93 (described vaguely as "PROCESSION OF CANTERBURY PILGRIMS; *with explanations by the artist*"), for £10.10.0 to (2) Stirling, i.e., Sir "William Stirling[Maxwell]" (1818-1878) who added his bookplate and from whom it passed to his son (3) Sir John Maxwell Stirling-Maxwell (1866-1956), who bequeathed it at his death to (4) GLASGOW UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

CONTEXT: Probably Blake sent copies of his advertisement for the *Descriptive Catalogue* in the spring of 1809 to friends like Thomas Butts, as he had the advertisement for the exhibition itself. The stress upon originality — "Original Conceptions on Art, by an Original Artist" — is Blake's response to the commonplace view, held notably by the Royal Academy, that engravers, as mere copyists, do not deserve the same respect as Original Artists. See the reproduction of Blake's Chaucer engraving page 123.

A DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE
OF
BLAKE'S EXHIBITION,
At No. 28, Corner of
BROAD-STREET,
GOLDEN-SQUARE.

THE grand Style of Art restored ; in Fresco, or Water-colour Painting, and England protected from the too just imputation of being the Seat and Protectress of bad (that is blotting and blurring) Art.

In this Exhibition will be seen real Art, as it was left us by *Raphael* and *Albert Durer*, *Michael Angelo*, and *Julio Romano*; stripped from the Ignorances of *Rubens* and *Rembrandt*, *Titian* and *Correggio* ;

BY WILLIAM BLAKE.

The Descriptive Catalogue, Price 2s. 6d. containing Mr. B's Opinions and Determinations on Art, very necessary to be known by Artists and Connoisseurs of all Ranks. Every Purchaser of a Catalogue will be entitled, at the time of purchase, to view the Exhibition.

These Original Conceptions on Art, by an Original Artist, are Sold only at the Corner of BROAD STREET.

Admittance to the Exhibition 1 Shilling: an Index to the Catalogue gratis.

Printed by Watts & Bridgewater, Southmolton-street.

A DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE (1809)

COPY REPRODUCED HERE: Copy O (Glasgow University Library)

LEAF SIZE: c. 11.5 x 19.0 cm. uncut (Copies C, E, G); Copy O is 11.0 (irregular) x 18.3 cm.

WATERMARK: 1807 A P edgemark

ORIGINAL BINDING: Probably stabbed in unlabelled greyish-blue paper wrappers.

BINDING AND HISTORY OF COPY O are as in the "Descriptive Catalogue" advertisement with which it is bound.

CONTEXT: Blake probably had fifty to a hundred copies of his *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809) printed to sell for 2s 6d to those who attended the exhibition of his sixteen water-colours and temperas held in his brother's hosiery shop at No. 28, Broad Street, Golden Square, Soho, which was also the Blake family home where the artist was born. A few extra copies were probably printed of gathering G, or at least of G6 containing the Index, for "A Descriptive Catalogue" advertisement offered "*an Index to the Catalogue gratis*" with the price of admission (1s) to the exhibition. No separate copy of the Index is known to have survived. Blake announced that "*the Exhibition . . . [will] close . . . the 29th of September 1809*" (p. [ii]), but it did not close then, and it may scarcely have been open at that unfashionable season. George Cumberland, Jr., apparently saw it in October 1809, Henry Crabb Robinson went to it on 23 April 1810, and he took Charles and Mary Lamb there on 11 June 1810.¹ On copies sold at the shop, Blake apparently regularly made two of the most obviously needed corrections to the *Descriptive Catalogue*, on the title-page to indicate where the pictures could be seen and purchased, and on p. 64. These two corrections are visible on about half (eight of seventeen) of the copies which have been traced, including Copy O reproduced here. The other copies, which were not corrected, he probably gave away to friends of later years — Frederick Tatham's (Copy P) was a gift "from the Author. June 12. 1824", and John Linnell bought his (Copy K) from Blake's widow in 1831, both copies lacking these corrections.

The only public notice of the *Descriptive Catalogue* was a savage attack in *The Examiner* for 17 September 1809, in which Robert Hunt called Blake "an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal offensiveness secures him from confinement" and whose "few wretched pictures . . . [are] very badly drawn."² Even Blake's friends were taken aback by the *Descriptive Catalogue* — George Cumberland wrote that "Blake's Cat. is truly original — part vanity part madness — part very good sense."³ Blake had replied boldly to Robert Hunt's criticisms of his *Grave* designs in print in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 36-37, but the reception of his exhibition and his *Descriptive Catalogue* apparently destroyed his faith in the benevolence of the public and drove him to scurrilous doggerel in his *Notebook*:

The Examiner whose very name Hunt

Called Death [*Blake*] a Madman trembling for the affront[.]⁴

For about ten years Blake was driven deeper and deeper into obscurity. Between 1809 and 1818 he received commissions for only four books and three separate engravings, so far as we know; his chief patron Thomas Butts seems to have asked for no more of his drawings; and Blake seems to have rebuffed new patrons and old friends alike. In July 1816 Nancy Flaxman wrote to her husband about "what pass'd between" Blake and an acquaintance who wanted to buy some of Blake's works:

I understand B— was very violent Indeed beyond *all credence* only that he has served you his *best friend* the *same trick* [some] time back as you must well remember . . . other people are not oblig'd to put up with *B's* odd humours[.]⁵

It is a sad period of Blake's life, when the fire of genius seems to be flickering out and he is withdrawn deep within himself.

But at the end of this period Blake was discovered by a group of young artists, among whom the best known today are John Linnell and Samuel Palmer and George Richmond, who became his friends and disciples, and the last ten years of Blake's life (1818-27) were among the most gloriously productive of his life. During these years he completed his *Jerusalem* (1804-20), his Virgil woodcuts (1821), his *Pilgrim's Progress* designs (?1824), his *Job* designs and engravings (1826) and his Dante designs and engravings (1824-27). Posterity has concluded that it was not Blake who misunderstood reality but Blake's contemporaries who misapprehended Blake.

PRESENT LOCATIONS OF PICTURES EXHIBITED IN 1809:

British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings (London): No. XIII Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University (Cambridge, England): No. XII Fogg Museum, Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts): No. XI (a copy by Blake [c. 1826] is in the Tate Gallery, and one by Linnell [c. 1821] is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England) Pollok House (Glasgow): No. III Southampton Art Gallery (Southampton, England): No. XV Tate Gallery (London): Nos. I-II, IV, XVI (a later version is in the Verney Collection) Victoria & Albert Museum (London): No. IX (the "*more perfect*" version is in Petworth House, Petworth, Sussex, the residence of the Earl of Egremont)

UNTRACED: No. V, VI (but a copy by Blake is in the Shakespeare second folio in the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings), VII-VIII, X

N.B. All the designs traced are reproduced in Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (1981), Vol. II.

*CORRIGENDA:*⁶

Title-page, after l. 16:

Add "At N 28 Corner of Broad Street Golden Square" (as Blake did in eight copies, including this one) Title-page, third line from bottom:

For "7" read "17" Berwick Street, Soho, the address of Daniel Nathan Shury from 1801 to 1822

p. iv, top para.:

The query after "How should he" should be at the end of the sentence p. iv, para. 2:

The full stop after "Outline" should be a comma, and the succeeding word ("On") should begin with a lower-case letter

p. iv, para. 2:

"We" should be lower-case

p. 1, para. 2:

The two sentences should be made one, perhaps by converting the central period to a comma

p. 3, top para.:

For "villany" read "villainy" (twice)

p. 4, top para.:

For "falshood" (a characteristic Blakean spelling) read "falsehood"

p. 4, top para.:

The comma after "Hercules" should be omitted

p. 7, l. 2 of the quotation

(like p. 21, ll. 2-3) has an extra quotation-mark at the beginning of the line, though this convention is not used elsewhere (see pp. 14-15, 18, 28-31, 33-36)

p. 8, l. 1:

The semi-colon after "cavalcade" should be a comma

p. 12, para. 2:

"It is very elegant, and" should perhaps be "they are very elegant, as"

p. 13, top para.:

For "London. Characters" read "London, characters"

p. 13, second line from bottom:

Add "B" to "ut"

p. 16, para. 2:

"For" should probably be omitted

p. 18, top para.:

For the full stop after "dispute" substitute a question-mark

p. 18, l. 3 of quotation:

The terminal punctuation of apostrophe and a single quotation-mark should be a double quotation-mark

p. 26, top para.:

"temper, he" should be "temper. He"

p. 26, last word:

For "Rubens'" read "Rubens'"

p. 28:

the second quotation should end with a double quotation-mark

p. 29, bottom para.:

"The Reeve" should be "the Reeve"

p. 31, end of para. 2:

The terminal punctuation should be a query

pp. 34-36:

Quotation-marks should be added at the beginnings and ends of quotations, as elsewhere

p. 37:

For "God's" read "gods"

p. 38, end of top para.:

The exclamation-point should probably be a query

p. 39, top para.:

For "sat" read "set"

p. 39, bottom para.:

The space in "historians" should be closed;

p. 41, top para.:

The space in "thin g" should be closed

p. 43, bottom para.:

"antiquities . . . is" should read "antiquities . . . are"

p. 44, top para.:

For the colon after "Voltaire", substitute a comma

p. 45, top para.:

For "opinions" read "opinion" — Copy K is thus corrected by hand

p. 46, l. 1:

A mark of punctuation such as a semi-colon is needed after "remains of antiquity"

p. 46, top para.:

For "Painting and Sculpture as it exists . . . is Inspiration . . . it is perfect" read "Painting and Sculpture as they exist . . . are Inspiration . . . they are perfect"

p. 47, middle para.:

For "The face and limbs that deviates or alters . . . is" read "The face and limbs that deviate or alter . . . are"

p. 49, bottom para.:

Suppress the black quad between "among" and "the"

p. 50, para. 2:

For the full stop after "naked" substitute a query

p. 64:

For "of want" read "want of", as Blake corrected copies B-D, F-H, J, L, and O (this one)

p. 65, l. 1:

For the full stop, substitute a query and insert the missing "i" in "lne"

p. 67, No. V:

For page "30" read "39"

NOTES TO DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE:

p. [iii]:

The misinformation about Correggio (1494-1534), Michaelangelo (1475-1564), and Titian (c. 1490-1576) is also given in Blake's notes

(?1808) to Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Works* (1798), p. 159 (*William Blake's Writings* [1978], p. 1489).

p. 1, No. 1:

When the picture was described

in the *Catalogue of the Fifth Annual Exhibition of the Associated Painters in Water Colours* At the Society's Rooms, No. 16, Old Bond Street (1812), the title was erroneously given as "unfolded", and on a sketch (now in the British Museum Print Room), Blake called it "The Spirit of Nelson guiding Leviathan in whose folds are intangled the Nations of the Earth". In his *Jerusalem* (1804-20), pl. 9, ll. 38-40, are the Spectre forms "Leviathan and Behemoth: The War by Sea enormous & the War By Land astounding".

p. 2, No. II:

The title inscribed by Blake in 1805 on the verso of the painting differs only in accidentals and in substituting "commanding" for "ordering" and when it was exhibited in the Water Colour Society in 1812 the only change of substance was "in" for "on" in "rides in the Whirlwind". Blake is silently quoting Joseph Addison's poem called *The Campaign* (1704). William Pitt died 23 January 1806.

p. 3, top para.:

This Work on Painting was apparently never published.

p. 7:

Blake's inscription on his engraving of Chaucer's *Canterbury Pilgrims* identifies all the characters but two children and a dog.

pp. 7-8:

The first four paragraphs of the Chaucer description were adapted in Blake's *Notebook*, pp. 117-119 (*William Blake's Writings* [1978], pp. 1004-1006) for a prospectus for the painting of the *Canterbury Pilgrims*.

pp. 7-8, 11-15, 18, 21, 23-24, 28-31:

Blake seems to be quoting, with minor normalizations, from *The Workes of Our Ancient and Learned English Poet, Geoffrey Chaucer* [ed. T. Speght] (1602), which has a list of "old and obscure words in Chaucer explained", evidently by Francis Thynne, to which Blake refers directly on p. 9 (the "Tabarde . . . Inn . . . was the lodging of the Abbott of Hyde by Winchester"). Blake quotes from The Author's Prologue, ll. 146-147 (p. 7), l. 622 (p. 8), l. 108 (p. 11), ll. 163-164 (p. 12), l. 208 (p. 13), ll. 237-238 (p. 14), ll. 663-665 (p. 18), l. 345 (p. 21 top), ll. 536-538 (p. 21 bottom), l. 24 (p. 23 top), l. 362 (p. 23 bottom), l. 83 (p. 24), ll. 83-87 (p. 28 top), ll. 94-96 (p. 28 bottom), ll. 99-100 (p. 29), l. 622 (p. 30), The Nun's Priest's Tale, ll. 3952-3959 (p. 15 top), The Monk's Tale, ll. 3132-3136 (p. 15 bottom), and The Wife of Bath's Tale, ll. 469-480 (pp. 30-31).

p. 10:

A selection from the *Canterbury Pilgrims* with two plates by Blake, called *The Prologue and Characters from Chaucer's Pilgrims* (1812), was published apparently to advertise Blake's print, and the first clause in the second paragraph here was quoted in it. The last sentence in that paragraph was paraphrased by William Hazlitt in his *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818), p. 50.

p. 25, para. 2:

The "ignorant hirelings" against whom Blake was defending himself had attacked his Blair designs in *The Examiner* (R[obert] H[unt]) for 7 August 1808, *The Antijacobin Review* for November 1808, and *The*

Monthly Magazine for 1 December 1808 (see *Blake Records* [1969], pp. 195-197, 199-210). He refers directly to Hunt's review on pp. 36-37.

The "competitors" here are Thomas Stothard, Louis Schiavonetti, and Robert Hartley Cromek. Cromek first commissioned Blake to make drawings and engravings for Blair's *Grave* and then gave the engravings to Schiavonetti, and he then commissioned Stothard to paint the Canterbury Pilgrims, based according to Blake on Blake's Chaucer drawing, and Schiavonetti to engrave it.

p. 28, top para.:

What Blake refers to as "my rival's prospectus" is the PROSPECTUS for Stothard's picture of THE PROCESSION OF CHAUCER'S PILGRIMS TO CANTERBURY which was printed with the edition of Blair's *Grave* (1808) with designs by Blake etched by Louis Schiavonetti. Blake refers to it on p. 10, para. 3, p. 23 top para., pp. 29, 30 ("H[oppner] says"), pp. 32, 33. Blake seems to assume that his readers will be familiar with the Stothard Prospectus.

pp. 33, 34:

The couplets appear in slightly modified form in Blake's *Notebook*, pp. 36, 34 (pp. 947, 945).

p. 42, top para.:

"the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" is Daniel 3:25.

p. 42, top para.:

The poem referred to seems to be Blake's *Jerusalem* (1804-?20).

p. 49, para. 2:

The quotation is from Isaiah 17:13.

p. 51:

The source of the "*fiery Pegasus*" is *Henry IV*, act 4, sc. 1, lines 104-110.

p. 52:

The "Missionary Voyage" is James Wilson, *A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean* (1799), pp. 129-130.

p. 52:

"Universal Theology" is Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion; Containing The Universal Theology of the New Church* [tr. J. Clowes] (1781), I, 237.

p. 54:

The "*Lady of high rank*" is the wife of the Earl of Egremont.

p. 59:

The "Hindoo scriptures, translated by Mr. Wilkin" is *The Bhāgavāt-Gēētā*, or Dialogues of Krēēshnā and Ārjōōn, tr. Charles Wilkins (1785; rpt. Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1959, 1972).

p. 61:

"England expects that every man should do his duty" is Nelson's Order of the Day to the fleet before the Battle of Trafalgar (1805).

p. 62:

The quotation is from Ruth 1:16-17.

NOTES:

1. *Blake Records* (1969), pp. 219, 225, 226.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

4. *Notebook*, p. 22 (p. 935).

5. *Blake Records*, pp. 241-42.

6. The corrigenda list omits minor eccentricities of punctuation and capitalization (which may reflect Blake's text), defects of type

(such as the broken first "i" in "sublimity" in p. 18, the "f" of the last "of" on p. 31 top paragraph in the wrong font), and the fact that pp. 44 and 47 have more lines than pp. 45-46. The work was *not* "on the whole carefully printed", as Sir Geoffrey Keynes asserts (*The Complete Writings of William Blake* [1957], p. 913).

See the reproduction of Blake's Chaucer engraving page 123.

A
DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE
OF

PICTURES,

Poetical and Historical Inventions,

PAINTED BY

WILLIAM BLAKE,

IN

WATER COLOURS,

BEING THE ANCIENT METHOD OF

FRESCO PAINTING RESTORED:

AND

DRAWINGS,
FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION,

AND FOR

*Sale by Private Contract,
at N^o 28 Corner of Broad Street Golden Square*

LONDON:

Printed by D. N. SHURY, 7, Berwick-Street, Soho,
for J. BLAKE, 28, Broad-Street, Golden-Square.

1809.