



William Blake: The Creation of the Songs, From Manuscript to Illuminated Printing

Michael Phillips

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The only manuscripts to survive that lead to the production of one of William Blake's published illuminated books are those of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, his most accessible and best-loved work. Here, one of the world's foremost authorities on Blake's manuscripts and illuminated printing details the evolution of this masterwork and its entire production process.

In the manuscript known as *An Island in the Moon* are found the beginnings of *Songs of Innocence* and in the *Manuscript Notebook*, a treasure of the British Library, over fifty poems in draft leading to *Songs of Experience*. All of the pages in manuscript of *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* are reproduced in color facsimile, including many of the drawings used in illustration, granting the reader a singular view of the artist's mind at work. Michael Phillips details the stages of Blake's composition and his remarkable technique of relief etching text and design on a single copperplate. For the first time, he demonstrates Blake's development of selective color printing of the design in opaque pigments over the original monochrome impression. Used in producing the first copies of *Songs of Experience*, this second step accounts for their dramatic contrast with the first issues of *Songs of Innocence*, which were hand-colored in transparent watercolors.

Blake united *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* in 1794 and produced copies in greater numbers than any other work until his death. In the past, the last copies Blake made have been reproduced because of their elaborate and expensive decoration. Phillips concentrates upon the first copies, revealing the original conception of the work. An impressive selection of these plates are reproduced for the first time.

This beautifully illustrated book is a major contribution to Blake studies. It will delight Blake enthusiasts and all who are fascinated by the extraordinary processes of creation and reproduction it describes.

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