

Printing Imperfections in William Blake's Virgil Wood Engravings and What They Reveal

BY LOUISE WILSON

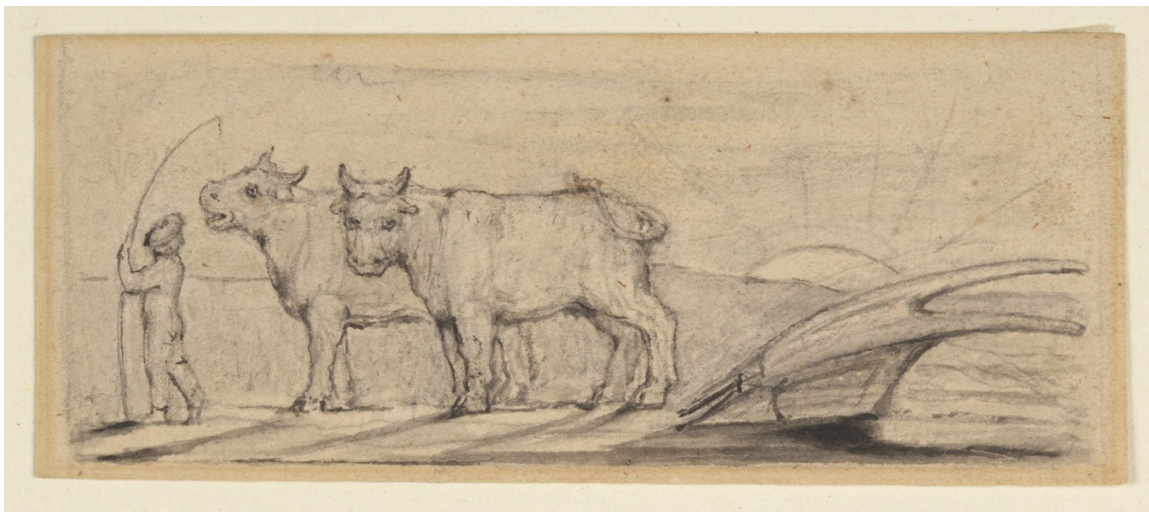
LOUISE WILSON (louise.wilson@ngv.vic.gov.au) has been conservator of paper at the National Gallery of Victoria since 2008 and contributes to the care of the NGV's rich and diverse paper-based holdings. She has broad research interests and has published on a range of subjects, including the conservation of Middle Eastern manuscripts, conservation treatment of Indian papercuts, technical examination of eighteenth-century tapa cloth from the Pacific region, European watermark collections, and the materials and techniques of William Blake, Albrecht Dürer, and Francisco de Goya.

1 THE National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne, Australia, is perhaps best known to Blake scholars for its magnificent suite of watercolors illustrating Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which was purchased from the John Linnell sale at Christie's in London in 1918. The NGV

also holds a composite group of fourteen wood engravings that Blake designed and engraved for Dr. Robert Thornton's *Pastorals of Virgil*, which were purchased in London in 1959 and are believed to have formed part of Linnell's collection as well. At first glance, these wood engravings are underwhelming; four are quite poor impressions, and one is a unique hybrid between a print and an ink wash drawing. Nevertheless, extensive technical examination undertaken by the NGV's paper conservation studio has revealed a range of printing imperfections, attributable to material choice and studio practices, which provide a tangible commentary on the complex history of Blake's Virgil woodblocks and the various artists who printed from them.

2 Much has been written about the history of Blake's wood engravings, so only a brief overview will be provided here. At Linnell's suggestion, Thornton commissioned Blake to produce wood engravings for his third edition of *The Pastorals of Virgil* (1821), a schoolbook designed to teach young boys Latin. Blake's task was to illustrate Ambrose Philips's imitation of Virgil's first eclogue, which follows two shepherds—the old, sagacious Thenot and the young, brooding Colinet—in various rural settings. Working in a pocket sketchbook, he created preparatory drawings in pencil, pen and ink, and wash that he later copied with ink onto pieces of boxwood in readiness for engraving (illus. 1).¹

1. Blake's uncut woodblock of the prophet Isaiah foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem (British Museum, 1939,0114.19) shows his technique of drawing lines with ink directly on the boxwood as a guide for cutting. I am indebted to Bethan Stevens for showing me this woodblock.



1. Illustration for Thornton's Virgil, *And Unyok'd Heifers, Loitering Homewards, Low*. Pen and black ink and gray wash over graphite, 3.7 x 9.1 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. x1944-531.

- 3 The boxwood preparer would have provided Blake with pieces of timber that had been cut across the growth rings. Known as the end grain, this feature (which enables more exacting, detailed cutting) distinguishes wood engravings from woodcuts, which are carved into timber cut longitudinally along the grain. Using familiar tools for engraving on metal, Blake cut away the compositional lines on the boxwood and printed proofs in black ink on China paper with his rolling press.² The growth rings of the end grain are sometimes visible as lines of reduced printing on wood engravings, as is the case with Blake's proof sheet now at the Fitzwilliam Museum (illus. 2).
- 4 When the woodblocks were prepared for publication, they were cut down, presumably to enable four images to fit on the chosen paper size with room for a title underneath each. The impressions in Thornton's schoolbook would have been printed on a hand press, which was ideally suited to relief processes like wood engraving. The printer would have positioned four of the small woodblocks, with a title in letterpress type under each one. The type and images were then wedged tightly together in a forme so that they didn't move during the printing process.³ While bound copies of Thornton's *Virgil* are highly collectible and expensive today, at the time of publication it was a simple textbook, to be printed within a budget. To keep costs down, a variety of poor-quality papers (both machine- and hand-made) were used.⁴ Generally, impressions in the work are not fine quality, possibly because of the speed of production and the paper.
- 5 Shortly after the book was published, Linnell purchased the woodblocks for his collection, and he later commissioned fellow artist Edward Calvert to print sets.⁵ Linnell had eight children, five of whom are known to have been artists.⁶ The woodblocks remained in the Linnell family for over a cen-

2. China paper is believed to have come to the United Kingdom as the lining of timber chests carrying tea. It is sometimes referred to as India paper, since the tea was imported by the British East India Company, but this is a misnomer (Jenkins 1).

3. The individual blocks and letterpress type would have been put in a frame-like structure called a chase, with any vacant space around the blocks packed out with small pieces of timber known as furniture. Quoins (expandable metal locks) would have been placed within the chase and opened with a key until the blocks were locked tight. This locked-up unit is referred to as a forme (see Marsh).

4. I noted the variety and quality of the paper while examining a copy (1863,1114.299) at the British Museum on 25 July 2019.

5. According to Linnell's diary for 8 September 1828, Calvert brought impressions printed from the original blocks (Lister, *Edward Calvert* 24).

6. His sons—John, James, William, and Thomas—are all recorded in census records as artists. He commissioned his daughter Hannah to copy pictures for him while she was in Italy with her new husband, Samuel Palmer (Lister, *Letters of Samuel Palmer* 94).

tury, with various family members undertaking printing sessions over this time.⁷

- 6 Four different paper types (indicating at least four different printing sessions) were used to produce the NGV's impressions: two subtly different China papers and two Western papers, one made on a laid mould and the other on a wove mould (illus. 3-6). Perhaps most striking is the range of printing imperfections, potentially showing different hands and studio practices at work. To better understand these faults and use them to identify printing sessions, I consulted eighteenth- and nineteenth-century printing treatises and sought other *Virgil* wood engravings for comparison. The NGV holds the only nineteenth-century impressions of these engravings in Australia. With no comparable material to examine locally, I traveled to the United Kingdom to study a variety of material related to the prints, including Blake's preparatory drawings, proofs, and original woodblocks; bound copies of *The Pastorals of Virgil*; over 150 impressions of the wood engravings; and documents pertaining to the woodblocks in the John Linnell Archive.⁸ To gain insight into Calvert's printing technique and choice of materials, I examined numerous impressions of his own wood engravings.
- 7 Calvert is best known for his intricate wood engravings of pastoral idylls, which are heavily influenced by Blake's *Virgil* designs. He ceased producing his own meticulous prints around 1831 and is unlikely to have been printing from the *Virgil* woodblocks after this date (Butlin and Gott 138). An extraordinary album of prints and drawings assembled by Alexander Constantine Ionides (illus. 7) contains a complete set of the *Virgil* wood engravings and eleven of Calvert's fifteen pastoral compositions (Evans 540-41). Ionides became acquainted with Calvert around 1828, when the latter was producing *Virgil* impressions for Linnell; it has been suggested that the *Virgil* wood engravings in the album are from this printing session (Evans 544). The scrapbook is therefore the perfect starting point for comparing Calvert's materials and methods—in the impressions of both his own and the *Virgil* wood engravings—with *Virgil* impressions in other collections.
- 8 The contents of the Ionides album are adhered to the pages, limiting the scope for paper examination. Despite this impediment, it was possible to discern that most of the paper supports used to print the *Virgil* and Calvert wood engravings bear the hallmarks of China paper. This very

7. Personal communication with Robert N. Essick, 16 September 2016, and Nick Lott, 7 May 2016.

8. This travel opportunity was made possible through the generous support of Peter Clemenger, AO, and the late Joan Clemenger, AO.



2. Proof sheet, showing curved lines of reduced printing corresponding to the concentric growth rings of the boxwood. Wood engraving, 17.0 x 10.4 cm. (sheet). Photo © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. MS CFM 31 f.3r.

I am grateful to Amy Marquis, research assistant in the Department of Paintings, Drawings, and Prints at the Fitzwilliam Museum, for confirming the measurements.



3. (above) "Menalcas' Yearly Wake." Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 6.4 × 9.9 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1883-5. Printed on Western laid paper; viewed by shining light through the sheet (transmitted light), showing the slightly transparent laid lines running vertically down the paper support.⁹

4. (below) "Colinet Resting at Cambridge by Night." Wood engraving, 3.3 × 7.3 cm. (image), 4.5 × 8.2 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1881-5. Printed on Western wove paper; viewed under transmitted light, showing the fine woven texture of the paper.



9. The titles assigned to the Virgil wood engravings vary from institution to institution. Those I use for the NGV impressions are from the most recent NGV Blake catalogue (Leahy).



5. (above) "With Songs the Jovial Hinds Return from Plow." Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.6 cm. (image), 5.6 × 9.1 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1885-5. Printed on China paper with transparent lines (known as *Su* lines) running horizontally across the sheet; viewed under transmitted light.

6. (below) "Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet, Lightfoot in the Distance." Wood engraving, 3.7 × 7.4 cm. (image), 4.1 × 7.6 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1875-5. Printed on China paper without transparent *Su* lines; viewed under transmitted light.



thin support, which many of the Virgil impressions that I examined are printed on, is produced from bamboo fibre. The addition of clay filler gives it a beautiful opacity, and the lack of sizing agent makes the end product highly absorbent of ink and yielding to woodblocks (Schenck 33-34).¹⁰ It is easily identified, even on very small works like the Virgil wood engravings, because it commonly contains the marks of its making, such as tiny spherical pits or inclusions resulting from the addition of clay. Under raking light (a light source shining across the paper), distinct linear indentations can be observed on one side. These sur-

10. The addition of clay, which is hygroscopic, renders China paper vulnerable to foxing, which is initiated by moisture. Many of the impressions examined (including those in the NGV collection) have undergone aqueous treatment to reduce foxing stains. This type of treatment causes subtle changes to the original character of the paper, such as altering the dimensions and thickness.

face imperfections are attributed to the way that Chinese papermakers attach newly formed sheets to a drying wall with a coarse brush, the hairs impressing lines on the surface of the wet sheet (illus. 8; Schenck 33-34).

9 While most prints in the Ionides album are on China paper, at first sight the impressions of “With Songs the Jovial Hinds Return from Plow,” “Colinet’s Fond Desire Strange Lands to Know,” “Colinet Mocked by Two Boys,” and Calvert’s “The Ploughman” appear to be printed on Western laid paper. This finding is not entirely surprising, since there are Virgil impressions on Western laid paper, such as “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake” at the NGV. Laid paper is made on a timber frame (a mould) with a sieve-like surface consisting of closely spaced brass wires running horizontally across the frame (the indentations these leave on the paper are called laid lines) and more widely spaced wires running vertically that are twisted around the laid wires to hold them in place (the indentations these leave are known as



7. Alexander Constantine Ionides album, fol. 2r. Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. E.1349-2001.



8. "Colinet Departs in Sorrow, a Thunder-Scarred Tree on the Right." Wood engraving, 3.6 × 7.4 cm. (image), 3.8 × 7.6 cm. irreg. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1876-5. Verso viewed under raking light, showing diagonal linear striations across the China paper support.

chain lines) (illus. 9-10).¹¹ When paper is formed, the wet pulp settles into the gaps, leaving thinner paper furrows in the areas corresponding to the placement of the laid and chain wires. Laid paper can be identified with transmitted light, which reveals the uneven thickness that results from the surface of the mould (see illus. 3). The side that the paper is formed on is referred to as the wire side. The laid lines, when viewed under raking light, form a texture on the wire side (like the surface of corduroy fabric) (illus. 11). The verso of the sheet, the felt side, is relatively smooth.

- 10 As I studied more Virgil impressions and Calvert wood engravings in other collections, I noted the appearance of laid lines on numerous prints. Some of these prints are not adhered to secondary supports, making it possible to examine them using transmitted light. When light was shone through them, the distinctive alternating density of laid lines was not visible, and it became clear that they are printed on China paper, not Western laid paper as their appearance suggests.¹² Under magnification, it was evident that the

11. Although the laid wires are oriented horizontally on the paper-making mould, when the paper is used, the artist might turn the paper so that these lines are oriented vertically (see illus. 3 and 11).

12. In addition to the impressions in the Ionides album at the Victoria and Albert Museum, I found many examples at the Fitzwilliam Muse-

um, British Museum, and National Gallery of Scotland. I thank Harry Metcalf, paper conservator, Fitzwilliam Museum, for carefully examining the proof first state of Calvert's "The Ploughman" (P.605-1985) and confirming that it is printed on China paper.

There will of course be cases where impressions, whether adhered to secondary supports or not, appear to be on laid paper and indeed are.

13. I am grateful to Yvonne (Bonnie) Hearn, former Sherman Fairchild Conservation Fellow, Thaw Conservation Center, Morgan Library & Museum, currently conservator of paper, NGV, for measuring lines of reduced printing on Calvert's "The Ploughman" (1974.50:2) at the Morgan.

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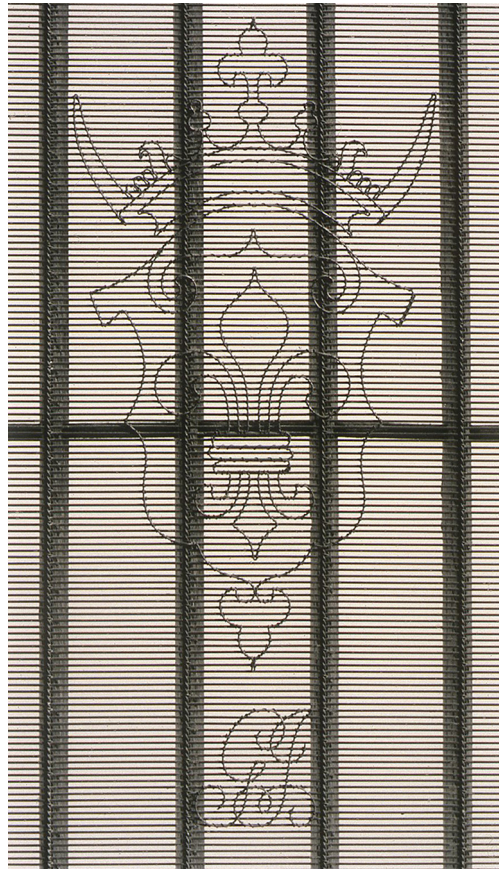
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9. (above) Griffith Jones of Nash Mill, Hertfordshire, laid papermaking mould and deckle (1809). Oak, pine, copper, and brass, 42.6 x 107.2 cm. © Bower Collection, London.

The chain wires on this mould (which is designed for making two sheets at a time) are 3.2 cm. apart and there are eight laid wires per cm. (The wires are not clearly visible in this image; see the detail in *illus. 10.*) The watermark is a fleur-de-lys on a crowned shield with a GJ monogram below; the countermark is G JONES / 1809.

I am indebted to Peter Bower for this information.



10. (left) Detail of the mould in *illus. 9*, showing the horizontal laid wires. The twisted chain wires are just visible, sitting on top of the timber ribs of the mould. © Bower Collection, London.



11. "Menalcas' Yearly Wake." Wood engraving, 3.5 x 7.4 cm. (image), 6.4 x 9.9 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1883-5. Viewed under raking light, showing the ridges between laid lines running vertically down the paper support.



12. Edward Calvert, "The Ploughman," showing horizontal lines of reduced printing. Wood engraving, 23.2 x 37.9 cm. Photo © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. P.605-1985.

haps to add cushioning or assist with handling the thin primary support, resulting in slightly reduced contact between the inked block and the China paper in areas corresponding to the furrows of the laid lines.

- 11 In 1828, Calvert lent his press to Linnell, noting that “its great defects are in being too small and being altogether a *make-shift*” (Lister, *Edward Calvert* 24).¹⁴ It is difficult to discern whether he is alluding to a type of hand press or a rolling press; potentially either could have produced impressions with the lines of reduced printing that I observed. In both scenarios, the inked matrix would have been placed face up on the bed of the press and covered first with the paper to be printed, followed by a piece of wastepaper. In the case of Calvert prints with lines of reduced printing, the wastepaper was probably laid paper, with the wire side in direct contact with the verso of the printing paper, and the impressions would have been pulled using moderate pressure.¹⁵ Not all Calvert prints bear this printing imperfection, because when the wastepaper required replacement, either laid paper—with the felt side in contact with the printing paper—or wove paper could have been used.
- 12 Linnell is known for his landscape and portrait paintings and engravings. Like many artists, he regularly had his engravings printed professionally, negating the need for a printing press of his own (Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* 103).¹⁶ At times, however, there was at least one printing press at his studio in Cirencester Place, Fitzroy Square. The year before Linnell borrowed Calvert’s press, Catherine Blake had moved to Cirencester Place, bringing her late husband’s rolling press with her (Bentley 468). The press remained there from August 1827 until spring 1828, when Catherine relocated to Charles Heathcote Tatham’s office and studio (Viscomi, “Posthumous Blake”).
- 13 The NGV’s impressions of “Sabrina’s Silvery Flood” and “Thenot and Colinet Sup Together” (illus. 13-14) both have imperfections indicating that they were produced on a rolling press: isolated areas of unintentional printing on their margins, referred to as foul ink. This error can occur if a rolling press is used to print thick woodblocks without the necessary adjustments being made. Blake’s Virgil woodblocks are approximately 2 cm. thick, so the height of the

14. A “make-shift” press for printing could refer to one designed for another purpose, such as a winepress.

15. Great pressure would have flattened the texture of the laid paper, resulting in more even contact between the woodblock and the China paper and thus more uniform printing.

16. He purchased a few copperplates from Hughes & Kimber, who supplied presses and materials for letterpress, lithographic, and intaglio printing. They were also copperplate printers, so it is possible that he utilized this service (“British Artists’ Suppliers”).

rollers should have been raised and the printing blankets staggered to create a gradual incline for the rollers to travel along.¹⁷ While there is no way of knowing if these impressions come from the press that belonged to Blake, the presence of foul ink shows that the precautions required for printing them on a rolling press were not taken; as a result, a small jolt occurred as the woodblocks passed under the rollers, shifting the paper slightly and accidentally transferring ink to the margins (Faithorne 57).

- 14 The unique and beautiful NGV impression of “Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low” (illus. 15) has an unusual black square in the lower-left margin, signaling that it was printed at the same time as another block (as was the case when the woodblocks were printed for Thornton’s *Pastorals of Virgil*). Since formes are not commonly used with a rolling press and it would have been very difficult to print multiple blocks at the same time without one, I assume that this impression comes from a hand press.
- 15 I examined numerous impressions where the ink was too heavily applied in some passages, leading to loss of definition, and underapplied in others, creating a hazy, indistinct effect (illus. 16). There are several potential causes: inconsistent pressure when printing, because of the uneven height of the woodblock (unlikely, since the impressions that I studied did not exhibit reduced printing in the same location on each image);¹⁸ uneven dampening of the paper prior to printing (improbable for impressions on China paper, as previously noted); or, the most likely cause in the case of the Virgil wood engravings, uneven application of ink.¹⁹ In the nineteenth century, both daubers and composition rollers were tools for applying ink to a matrix, with daubers being the traditional implement.²⁰ It is probable that, like Blake, Calvert and the Linnell family used a dauber to apply ink to the Virgil woodblocks. Achieving an even application requires considerable skill, the ink needing to be built up with consistently thin sequential layers on the surface of the matrix.

17. A printing blanket is made of felted wool. The slight pliability of the blanket helps to achieve good contact between the printing matrix and the paper to be printed on.

The inked matrix would have been placed face up on the bed of the press and covered first with the paper to be printed, followed by a piece of wastepaper, and a printing blanket would have been laid over the top of this sandwich.

18. This issue can be rectified by a process called making right, whereby the back of the woodblock is gradually built up by adhering fragments of paper, shaped identically, to the areas that are underprinting.

19. Personal communication with Michael Phillips, 2 August 2019.

20. Daubers are also called ink balls or dabbers. They are the shape of a muller and can be made by rolling wool or cloth into a ball and covering it tightly with linen or leather to form a round pad. A wooden handle is bound into the open end.



13. (above) "Sabrina's Silvery Flood," showing foul ink on the left side of the upper margin. Wood engraving, 3.3 × 7.3 cm. (image), 3.5 × 7.5 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1879-5.

14. (below) "Thenot and Colinet Sup Together," showing foul ink on the lower margin. Wood engraving, 3.4 × 7.6 cm. (image), 6.0 × 8.9 cm. irreg. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1884-5.





15. (above) "Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low," showing partial printing of another woodblock in the lower-left corner. Wood engraving, 3.3 × 7.7 cm. (image), 4.7 × 9.4 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1886-5.

16. (below) "The Good Shepherd Chases Away the Wolf," showing underinking on the lower-left corner and overinking in areas of the tree on the right. Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 4.1 × 8.1 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1878-5.





17. “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake,” showing the mottled appearance of the image relating to the use of excess weak oil to make the ink. Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 6.4 × 9.9 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1883-5.

16 “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake” (NGV, illus. 17) and Tate’s impression of the same image, “For Him Our Yearly Feasts and Wakes We Hold” (Tate, A00123), were printed with ink that does not have a well-balanced ratio between pigment and oil, leaving an oily halo. This imperfection suggests the application of an ink that was not commercially produced. Printing treatises available during Blake’s time describe the making of ink at length and discuss the use of “weak” and “strong” oil combined with dry pigment to create black printing ink (Faithorne 62-64). Weak oil is not heated to the same extent as strong oil, resulting in differences in their flowing qualities—weak oil is more mobile and ideally suited to intaglio techniques, where it migrates into the incised lines, while strong oil is more viscous, producing an ink with a short tack that sits on the surface of the matrix and is ideally suited to relief techniques like wood engraving.²¹ The appearance of the ink in these impressions reveals that weak rather than strong oil was added. Linnell produced intaglio prints and was probably more familiar with

the type of ink required; Calvert was more focused on wood engraving and would have known the nuances of preparing ink for that technique. This suggests that these two prints are more likely to have been created by a member of the Linnell family.

17 “Menalcas’ Yearly Wake” also has marked blind embossing on its verso (illus. 18), indicating that the pressure exerted during printing was much greater than that used to pull Tate’s impression.²² It was probably printed on a rolling press, where the pressure is easily controlled. Printers sometimes increase pressure to achieve a second pull, meaning that they do not reink the matrix and instead try to extract any residual ink.²³ The NGV’s print is on a medium-weight Western laid paper support, which is not ideally suited to

22. Tate’s impressions have undergone aqueous treatment, which could have reduced blind embossing, but is unlikely to have removed it completely.

I am grateful to Rosie Freemantle, former paper conservator, Tate, for sharing details of the treatment history of Tate’s prints.

23. Personal communication with Michael Phillips, 2 August 2019.

21. Personal communication with Adrian Kellett, 11 October 2019.

achieving a good impression from a woodblock. It was possibly created as the first stage of cleaning the block after a printing session, a process requiring great care to avoid compromising the clarity of the engraved lines. Pulling prints using scrap paper lying around the studio is a quick, easy, and common method of removing the bulk of the residual ink prior to gentle wiping with a soft cloth.²⁴ The resulting prints are referred to as maculature impressions.

- 18 Many of the impressions that I studied have tiny dots of ink within fine compositional lines. For example, the sky region of the NGV's "Colinet Mocked by Two Boys" (illus. 19) and Tate's impression of the same work, "Colinet with His Shepherd's Pipe, Mocked by Two Boys" (Tate, A00122), have numerous dots within identical lines. They may have been produced during the same printing session, or the blocks may not have been adequately cleaned between sessions, allowing minute nuggets of ink to dry.²⁵

24. Personal communication with Ros Atkins, 27 October 2019.

25. Personal communication with Nick Lott, 7 May 2016.

- 19 The NGV's "Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low" (illus. 15) is very lightly printed and extensively touched with bistre ink.²⁶ Like "Menalcas' Yearly Wake," it may well be a maculature impression, casually produced as a means of cleaning the block at the end of a session; rather than casting it away, somebody, perhaps Blake himself or one of the Linnells, applied delicate washes of ink in a manner similar to Blake's preparatory drawings (see illus. 1). Blake and his wife, Catherine, are known to have touched prints with ink in order to rectify a printing imperfection or enhance the composition, as are members of the Linnell family.²⁷ Linnell or his sons are credited with hand coloring

26. Infrared examination confirmed that the ink is bistre, a brown ink made from chimney soot.

27. The woodblocks of "Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet," "Blasted Tree and Blighted Crops," and "Colinet Departs in Sorrow, a Thunder-Scarred Tree on the Right" were cut down roughly, leaving an upper corner angled. On an impression of "Thenot Remonstrates with Colinet" (Fitzwilliam Museum, P.59-1950), pencil has been used to continue the composition into the margin, creating a right-angled corner. An impression of "Blasted Tree and Blighted Crops" in the collection



18. "Menalcas' Yearly Wake," viewed from the verso under raking light, showing blind embossing. Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.4 cm. (image), 6.4 × 9.9 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1883-5.



19. "Colinet Mocked by Two Boys," showing tiny nuggets of dried ink trapped between engraved lines around the figure of the boy on the left. Wood engraving, 3.5 × 7.7 cm. (image), 3.9 × 8.2 cm. (sheet). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 1882-5.

seven Virgil wood engravings; Hannah Palmer (née Linnell), who colored a set of Linnell's lithographs, could also have had a hand in them.²⁸ The artist responsible for the beautiful brushwork on "Unyoked Heifers Loitering Homeward, Low" is unlikely to have been Calvert, as he was strongly against touching wood engravings with ink (Lister, *The Letters of Samuel Palmer* 18).

- 20 Technical examination of the Virgil wood engravings in the NGV and comparison with examples in other collections have provided insights into how imperfections can help us to understand the method in which an impression was produced. The NGV's composite group includes impressions printed with different presses, papers, and inks. Several that were perhaps destined for the dustbin were retained, and one was extensively touched with ink and transformed into a work of great beauty. Examination of works in collections in the United Kingdom revealed a subtle quirk of Calvert's printing technique that can aid identification of Virgil im-

of Michael Phillips has been touched with ink on the upper-left corner to complete the composition (Phillips, *William Blake: Apprentice and Master* 193).

28. See Lister, *The Letters of Samuel Palmer* 94; *Catalogue of the John Linnell Collection* 10; and James. Linnell's set of lithographs after Michelangelo are described in the 1918 sale catalogue as being colored in Italy by Mrs. Samuel Palmer. I am indebted to Lauren Lott for showing me the catalogue and the hand-colored set of lithographs.

pressions printed by him. It is now possible to appreciate the NGV's wood engravings in their broader context and to recognize that, while many of them may not be the finest impressions, they provide a valuable window into the history of Blake's Virgil woodblocks.

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