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*Iniquitous Symmetries: aestheticism and  
secularism in the reception of William  
Blake's works in books and periodicals  
during the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s*

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## *Summary*

This thesis examines Blake's posthumous reception, focusing particularly on the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s as decades in which Blake's reputation was both consolidated as a poet and artist, and invigorated as a radical sympathizer. As Blake's texts and life were being formed and re-formed in physically and conceptually elaborate books, such as Alexander Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* and Algernon Charles Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay*, significant and innovative appropriations of Blake's poetry and illustrations were made in Republican and freethinking periodicals and pamphlets. This thesis recovers some of that material.

Retrieving the influence of such "low culture" ephemera on the "high" culture of Pre-Raphaelite creativity allows the Victorian Blake to emerge as a multi-faceted, contradictory production: both secular iconoclast *and* mystical visionary, blasphemous sibyl *and* poet of social justice. Nineteenth-century readings and reproductions of Blake are a chronicle of freethought and freeform. The multiplicity of Blake in this period, in both reproduction and interpretation, enables a questioning of books and periodicals as mediums of representation. Blake's reproduction in the nineteenth century coincides with, and yet confounds, Foucauldian configurations of nineteenth-century representation. Although Blake *is* depicted as a lone, isolated individual – often labouring under the insane tag - this does not simply signify an epistemological nadir of vacuous, disconnected individualism, such as Foucault identifies.

On the contrary, this thesis seeks to prove that the enthusiasm for Blake in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s is facilitated by a deep connectivity of medium and message, and between different mediums and different messages. The political stance of Secularism meets the cultural concerns of Aestheticism, both reproducing Blake through technology that improvises upon and rejuvenates Blake's own unique craft.

## *Abbreviations*

### **Abbreviations of William Blake's works**

Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Blake's texts are to plate and page numbers in David Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. edn. (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

E	Erdman, David, ed. <i>William Blake, The Complete Poetry and Prose</i>
<i>Jer</i>	<i>Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion</i>
<i>Job</i>	<i>Illustrations of the Book of Job</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Milton a Poem</i>
<i>MHH</i>	<i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
<i>S of I&amp;E</i>	<i>Songs of Innocence and of Experience</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>Public Address</i>
<i>VDA</i>	<i>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</i>
<i>VJL</i>	<i>A Vision of the Last Judgement</i>

### **Abbreviations of Other Works**

<i>AS</i>	Swinburne, Algernon Charles, <i>William Blake: a critical essay</i> , ed. Hugh J. Luke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1970)
<i>BAV</i>	<i>Blake Newsletter</i> 8:1 – 2 (1974), a single issue entitled "Blake Among Victorians"
<i>BB</i>	Bentley, G.E., <i>Blake Books: annotated catalogue of William Blake's writings</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977)
<i>BBS</i>	- <i>Blake Books Supplement: a bibliography of publications and discoveries about William Blake, 1971 – 1992, being a continuation of the Blake Books (1977)</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)

- BR - *Blake Records* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969)
- BRS - *Blake Records Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)
- Blake in 90s* Clark, Steve and David Worrall, eds *Blake in the Nineties* (London: Macmillan, 1999)
- Blake/Shelley* Thomson, James, *Shelley, a poem: with other writings relating to Shelley, by the late James Thomson (B.V.) to which is added an essay on the poems of William Blake, by the same author* (printed for private circulation at the Chiswick Press, 1884)
- CA Arnold, Matthew, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935)
- CS Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Society, 1780 - 1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958)
- Canterbury Blake* Skipsey, Joseph, ed., and Prefatory Notice, *The Poems, with Specimens of prose Writings, of William Blake* (London: Walter Scott [The Canterbury Poets], 1885)
- HH Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Heaven and Its Wonders, and Hell: from things seen and heard*, ed. J. Howard Spalding, based on a translation by F. Bayley for the Swedenborg Society (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1909)
- IB Viscomi, Joseph, "Facsimile or Forgery? an examination of *America*, Plates 4 and 9, Copy B" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 16:4 (1981), pp.218– 223
- Life* Gilchrist, Alexander. *The Life of William Blake*. ed. Ruthven Todd (London: Everyman, 1945)
- Life 1863* - *The Life of William Blake* (London: Macmillan, 1863)
- Life 1880* - *The Life of William Blake* (London: Macmillan, 1880)
- Lit. Sym.* Adams, Hazard, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983)
- Mod. Text.* McGann, Jerome, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1992)
- Nineteenth Century* Dorfmann, Deborah, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century: his reputation as a poet from Gilchrist to Yeats* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969)

- OT* Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: an archeology of the human sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1970)
- Pickering Blake* Shepherd, Richard Herne, ed. *The Poems of William Blake, comprising of Songs of Innocence and of Experience together with Poetical Sketches and some copyright poems not in any other edition* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1874)
- Radical Artisan* Smith, Francis Barrymore, *Radical Artisan, William James Linton 1812 - 1897* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973)
- Sar. etc.* Carlyle, Thomas, *Sartor Resartus/ Lectures On Heroes/ Chartism/ Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896)
- Swin. Letts.* Lang, Cecil Y., ed. *The Swinburne Letters*, 6 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959)
- Text. Cond.* McGann, Jerome, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991)
- Wilkinson Blake* Wilkinson, James John Garth, ed. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, ed. (London: William Pickering, 1839)
- Work of Art* Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, and trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992)

**PERIODICAL PRELUDES:  
Blake's Reception History 1828 - 1900**

# CHAPTER ONE

## *Introduction*

Critical understanding of Blake's posthumous reputation in the nineteenth century, from 1828 onwards has been concentrated around the 1860s "revival". The Pre-Raphaelite Blake, recreated through the interpretative and editorial work of Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti, as well as Algernon Charles Swinburne, has been seen as the real blossoming of interest in Blake. What went before, in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s, mainly in journalistic and periodical form, has been relegated as the scattering of disparate seeds. What came after, in the form of review, critical essay in periodical format, popular edition or the general attempt at widening the cultural parameters and presentation of Blake, have been seen as lesser flowerings, wild blooms on the path to Ellis's and Yeats's major study of 1893.

The periodical reception history of Blake has always been overshadowed by the three dominant nineteenth-century studies of Blake: Alexander Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* (1863)<sup>1</sup>, Algernon Charles Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay* (1868)<sup>2</sup> and Edwin John Ellis's and William Butler Yeats's *The Works of William Blake, Poetic*.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus"* 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1863). The *Life* was amended and extended in a "deluxe" edition of 1880: Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus"* 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1880). For convenience, I will generally, when there is no disparity between the 1863 and 1880 edition, quote from the Everyman edition of 1945: Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake, "Pictor Ignotus"*, ed. Ruthven Todd (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1945). I will refer to this edition in the main text as *Life*, followed by page number(s). Where necessary I will refer to the 1863 edition as *Life* 1863, and to the 1880 edition as *Life* 1880, followed by page number(s). The *Life* is receiving renewed interest at the moment, a reprint of the 1907 edition published by John Lane, and edited and introduced by W. Graham Robertson, was republished in a Dover edition in 1998. Keri Davies has, this year, taken Gilchrist into cyberspace, by publishing the 1863 edition on The Blake Centre website. The web address is:

[www.theblakecentre.freeerve.co.uk/pages/Gilchrist.LifeOfBlake](http://www.theblakecentre.freeerve.co.uk/pages/Gilchrist.LifeOfBlake)

<sup>2</sup> Algernon Charles Swinburne, *William Blake: a critical essay* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1868). Again, for convenience, I will quote from Algernon Charles Swinburne, *William Blake: a critical essay*, ed. Hugh J. Luke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970). I will refer to this edition in the main text as *AS* followed by page number(s).

*Symbolic and Critical* (1893).<sup>3</sup> There are contradictions and continuities between Blake encountered within the pages of elaborately illustrated books, which bear the weight of the age's seminal aesthetic and philosophical minds, and Blake as a periodical product, reproduced in ephemeral media, often through politically marginal and anonymous voices. Kevin Gilmartin reconfigures print politics in the early nineteenth century: individual experience is dialectically entailed with public debate through the constant formation and reformation of printed oppositional discourse.<sup>4</sup> This formulation offers a persuasive model of an alternating current between the "low" culture of popular, public sphere periodicals and pamphlets, and the "high" culture of aesthetically inclined, individual reading, typified in the main by the book.

However, Blake and Blake's reception history is a short-circuit in Gilmartin's model, Blake suffering from that peculiar isolationism that separates the visionary from the practical: "[...] the difference between Blake and Cobbett was a difference between poetry and prose, between vision and understanding, between making and remaking, and between revolution and reform" (*Print Politics*, p.160). Blake's re-articulation in Milton of a popular handbill issued during the agitation surrounding the 1800 bread-riots, demonstrates Blake's ability to "remake" popular and political discourse in the form of a book.<sup>5</sup> This ability to re-make is a prominent feature of Blake's Victorian reception history, enacted through miscellaneous journals and in diverse discourses. For example, a report appearing in an 1868 psychology journal, almost simultaneously with Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay*, appropriates "The Tyger" in order to illustrate the limitations of psychological discourse. The report, entitled "The Alton

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3 Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic and Critical* 3 vols (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893). I will refer to this edition in the main text as *Ellis/ Yeats* followed by page number(s).

4 Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: the press and radical opposition in early nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.69.

5 David Worrall, *Radical Culture: discourse, resistance and surveillance, 1790 – 1820* (Harvester Wheatsheaf: London, 1992), pp.44ff.

Murder", deals with the horrific murder of a little girl. The article's use of Blake illuminates an abyss of psychological experience:

That the murderer was a monstrosity may be admitted, but monstrosities are not self-created, they must have their necessary antecedents in the order of events: not casualty but causality governs them, the universe, and their appearance in it. There is but one answer to the question, so strikingly put by the engraver Blake in his little poem addressed to the tiger –

“Did He smile his work to see?

Did he who made the lamb make thee?”<sup>6</sup>

What this thesis will seek to recover is the re-made nature of Blake in the nineteenth century, in both the pages of periodicals and pamphlets and behind the covers of the big book studies, in words and in images. Keeping open the channels of communication between “low” and “high” culture, the success of the book in preserving and expanding Blake's reputation will be re-examined, particularly in relation to the cultural significance of the book: what the book meant to a culture in the throes of secularization, the aesthetic magneticism of the book and what the book excluded in the way of popular discourse and popular readership. A review of Gilchrist's *Life* in 1863 gives some flavour of the elitism adhering to the book: “These are no everyday volumes; they have a high beauty, both substantial and artistic – are fit for a place of honour on the drawing-room table and on the library shelf. Those mental haschish-eaters [sic.] who form the bulk of the ‘reading public’ will, perhaps, not care for them much; but they will find their own public, and the name and genius of William Blake

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<sup>6</sup> Anon., “The Alton Murder” in *Journal of Mental Science* 13 (January 1868), p.548 -549. I would like to thank Sam Greasley and Jason Whittaker for bringing my attention to this bizarre and horrific article.



will, by their help, become known to thousands, and no longer remain as the almost private treasure of a small and scattered band of enthusiasts”.

Alexander Gilchrist describes *Jerusalem* in *The Life of William Blake* as a “[...] mixture of the unaccountable with the familiar” (*Life*, p.201). This could serve well as an epithet not just of Gilchrist’s *Life* but of the first sixty years of Blake’s nineteenth-century reception history. “Unaccountable” in a qualified sense, referring to articles buried in periodicals and images unrecognised in pamphlet margins. These little works have been largely neglected in twentieth-century conceptions of nineteenth-century Blake readings. Although a substantial amount of *reckoning* has been done of Blake as a periodical product, such as G.E. Bentley’s list in the *Blake Books Supplement* referring to periodical reprintings of Blake between 1809 and 1851 (drawing on Raymond Deck Jr.’s survey of Swedenborgian mediations between 1821 – 1851),<sup>8</sup> no real attempt has been made at *accounting* for these collective fragments.

The constant recovery of these citations over the last 30 years, particularly of those in the public domain before 1863 and the publication of Gilchrist’s *Life*, call for a reassessment of the conclusion to the last major study of Blake’s reputation in the nineteenth century: “From nothing – no printed texts, no reading public, no confidence in a man presumed insane – Blake’s nineteenth-century editors cleared a narrow path for readers to approach him”.<sup>9</sup> This thesis will contend that Dorfmann’s conclusions require substantial qualification if the big book studies are restored to a more diverse

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7 Anon., “Review” in *Reader* 11 (7<sup>th</sup> November 1863), p.529.

8 G.E. Bentley, *Blake Books Supplement: a bibliography of publications and discoveries about William Blake, 1971 – 1992, being a continuation of the Blake Books (1977)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp.147 – 148. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *BBS*, followed by page number(s). Raymond H. Deck, Jr., “Unnoticed Printings of Blake’s Poems, 1825 – 1851” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 10:4 (1977), p.125.

9 Deborah Dorfmann, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century: his reputation as a poet from Gilchrist to Yeats* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969). Hereafter this study will be referred to as *Nineteenth Century*, followed by page number(s).

cultural context of periodical and pamphlets. In so doing I hope to build on models of the relation of high and popular culture developed in recent work on the 1790s and before that the Interregnum period. This reassessment partially involves highlighting some of the significant cultural productions of Blake that have previously been regarded as peripheral. In particular, it will involve an assessment of primary research in to the little explored area of Blake's relationship with the atheistic freethinkers or Secularists of the nineteenth-century. The parasitic, symbiotic or predatory relationship of these tenacious ephemera with the full length studies and reproduction of Blake in Gilchrist's *Life* and Swinburne's *Critical Essay* will form topics of exploration throughout the thesis.

The first section of the thesis is concerned with cultural contexts, the second with textual bibliography, and the third with aesthetic production. Steve Clark and David Worrall delineate three main critical traditions in Blake scholarship: the editorial, hermeneutic and historical.<sup>10</sup> I intend to utilise these broad categories, while adapting to the cultural specifics of the period in question. In this introduction, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, published in 1868<sup>11</sup> will provide a spirit level of nineteenth- as opposed to twentieth-century criticism.

The last decade of the twentieth century saw a wide range of excellent historically based studies of the 1790s ranging from Bruder's gender politics (spanning the macroclitoris to the salon); McCalman's infidel coteries; Schuchard's Illuminati conspiracies:

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<sup>10</sup> Steve Clark and David Worrall, "Introduction" in *Blake in the Nineties*, eds Steve Clark and David Worrall (London: Macmillan, 1999), p.1. Hereafter this collection will be referred to as *Blake in 90s*, followed by page number(s)

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935). Hereafter, this text will be referred to as *CA*, followed by page number(s).

Worrall's tracing of plebian culture; and Mee's political and religious bricolage.<sup>12</sup> These polysemous perspectives of history are as true for Blake's nineteenth-century afterlife as they have proven to be for his eighteenth-century life. But the immediate concerns of nineteenth-century thinkers and interpreters, the voices of a time and a culture, are not with the archaeology of history but with the architecture of culture. For example, Arnold takes two distinct histories from two distinct historical worlds, the Hellenic and the Hebraic, and compresses and elevates them into meta-narratives of culture.<sup>13</sup> In doing so he is inserting what Gilmartin terms programmatic values into the immediacy of the periodical form (*Print Politics*, p.75). *Culture and Anarchy* had its beginning in Arnold's last lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, delivered under the title of "Culture and its Enemies" in May 1867. Two months later, this lecture was published in periodical form in the *Cornhill*, succeeded in January, February, June, July and September 1868 by five other articles under the title "Anarchy and Authority". The essay is both a reactionary response to the Hyde Park riots – the defensive/ responsive engagement of the periodical with contemporary events – and a programmatic formulation for the development of modern culture. *Culture and Anarchy* traverses all of Gilmartin's periodical permutations, from orally transmitted public event, to engaged periodical, to programmatic volume. The historical intersections that we see in the Foucauldian re-workings of 1790s culture are equally valid for both the high tide of Victorian culture (and anarchy), and Blake's reception within that culture.

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12 Helen Bruder, *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp.62, 139.; Iain McCalman, "The Infidel as Prophet: William Read and Blakean Radicalism in *Historicizing Blake*" eds Steve Clark and David Worrall (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp.24 – 42; Marsha Keith Schuchard, "Blake and the Grand Masters (1791 – 4): architects or repression or revolution" in *Blake in 90s*, pp.173 – 193; David Worrall, "Blake and the 1790s: plebeian radical culture" in *Blake in 90s*, pp.194 – 211; Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the culture of radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.8.

13 Hebraism indicates energy. Hellenism indicates intelligence, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.129. Arnold states: "Hebraism and Hellenism, - between those two points of influence moves our world. At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them" (*CA*, p.130).

What matters for Blake's posthumous reputation is how his texts function across a broad cultural spectrum. Reconstruction of individual response remains inevitably speculative. But at the same time, the imbedded cultural discourses that individual readings contain need to be recovered in order to avoid critical foreshortening of those readings. What this thesis will concentrate on are the tangible cultural products of books and periodicals, while endeavouring to tease out how the book functions as a vehicle of cultural meaning for individual critics, particularly Gilchrist and Swinburne. The persistent presence and integrity of the book accounts for the swing that Clark and Worrall identify from the hermeneutic intensity and deconstructive poise of the 1980s to the bibliographical ultra-empiricism of the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> A strong agreement exists between nineteenth- and twentieth-century Blake scholarship where the longevity of the book's significance is concerned. But the approach is different, although both share in common the dusting off and laying out of that "valley of dry bones, bibliography".<sup>15</sup> Whereas the Victorians seek forward to reconstruct the ideal book, twentieth-century Blake critics search backwards to deconstruct, to arrive back at an ideal copy. The nineteenth century emphasises the bibliographical as bookish reconstruction and the twentieth century emphasises the bibliographical as editorial deconstruction. David Erdman sounds like a textual pathologist in his description of recovering deletions and erasures from *Jerusalem*.<sup>16</sup> Bentley becomes a papyrus detective in order to ascertain the date of the Pickering manuscript from a palimpsest fragment of type.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the contention of this thesis is that nineteenth-century Blake critics attempted to reconstruct the book as an architectonic expression of their own culture, to recreate what William Morris

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14 "The 1990s witnessed a curious mutation of deconstruction into a fastidious bibliographical ultra-empiricism" (*Blake in 90s*, p.1).

15 Robert Essick, "Blake and the Production of Meaning", in *Blake in 90s*, pp.7 - 26 (p.8).

16 David V. Erdman, "The Suppressed and Altered passages in Blake's *Jerusalem*" in *Studies in Bibliography* 17 (1964), pp.1 - 54.

17 G.E. Bentley, "The Date of Blake's Pickering Manuscript *Or* The Way of a Poet with Paper" in *Studies in Bibliography* 19 (1966), pp.232 - 43.

describes as the “architecturally good” or ideal book.<sup>18</sup> The Victorian sense of bibliography, the one which I wish to adopt, is far more concerned with the book as a whole, the way books become something of cultural value. Arnold opens *Culture and Anarchy* with the description of a book he loves (*CA*, p.3). describing in detail its binding, and he calls the bible “...not only a national book, but the Book of the Nations” (*CA*, p.38). Interestingly, Joseph Viscomi’s workshop reconstructions of Blake’s illuminated books, initiated by the Manchester Etching Workshop in 1983,<sup>19</sup> married the editorial concerns of the objective scholar-critics, such as Erdman or Bentley, with the reconstructive impulse of the Victorian bookmakers. Rather than the 1980s hermeneutic question, “what/how does it mean?” the critics of the 1860s were faced with the aesthetic question of “what is it worth”?

In Gilmartin’s model, the organization of the radical press seeks to reiterate the connectivity between economic worth and epistemological value (*Print Politics*, p.109). This radical organicist stance is, in the Foucauldian model of the epistemological shift towards self-coherent but hollow systems of knowledge, an anachronistic disorganisation. The periodical, in this sense, would seem to work by a system of “mystical” correspondence, the universe denoted by a deep connectivity. Conversely, the book, although older in format, would seem to develop into its own self-bound, self-sufficient system of reference. However, these categories are not mutually exclusive, particularly where the book is concerned, and Blake is carried forward in Gilchrist and Swinburne by an imbedded sensitivity to wider connections. In the opening chapter of

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18 William Morris, “The Ideal Book: a lecture delivered in 1893” in *The Ideal Book: essays and lectures on the arts of the book*, ed. William S. Petersen (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1982), pp.67 – 73.

19 Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.xxiv. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *IB*, followed by page number(s).

the cultural contexts section, the epistemological foundations for these literary formulations are laid, particularly through romantic and secular symbolism.

The epistemological spectrum of the nineteenth century is coloured by shades of faith and doubt, ranging from confidence in a positivist universe to fear of godless nihilism. Blake's indefatigable belief in the divinity of humanity offered a solid yet open foundation on which various cultural speculators could build. In the second chapter of the cultural contexts section, two areas of cultural prospecting are investigated: the gravitation of freethinking atheists and agnostics towards Blake's mystical imagination, and the excavation of Blake's political commitment by adherents to those new religions of art, Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism. Secular-mysticism denotes the profound return of mystical knowledge into the secular heart of Victorian culture.

Correspondence reaches the nineteenth century as an aesthetic or poetic paradigm, not a theological doctrine. By the time of the mid-century revival, Swinburne would be re-ascribing Blake's esoteric individuality and mysticism within Aestheticism's "beauty of symbol".<sup>20</sup> Conversely, by the time of the 1880s blasphemy trials of Secularist publications, Blake would have appeared as a mystical iconoclast in the pages of those publications, ranging from a four part series in the *National Reformer*, to visual parody in the *Freethinker*. The atavistic concept of mystical correspondence is reborn as an aesthetic paradigm: an aesthetic paradigm is delivered as secular comment on political history.

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<sup>20</sup> "A single man's work, however exclusively he may look to inspiration for motive and material, must always want the breadth and variety of meaning, the supple beauty of symbol, the infectious intensity of satisfied belief, which grow out of creeds and fables native to the spirit of a nation, yet peculiar to no man or sect, common yet sacred, not invented or constructed, but found growing and kept fresh with faith" (*AS*, p.194).

Looking inwards from the secular culture of the nineteenth century to the experience of the individual, understanding and being are defined by a constant struggle for synthesis between self and society, between the psychological individual and imagined communities. The urge to encompass the human as both constituent of a body politic and as an individual essence is an urgent and haunting presence in nineteenth-century literature. Later nineteenth-century literature is constantly returning to expressions of the dichotomy between a social universe operating by structural laws and the compression of the individual into an alienated, isolated self. This is the underlying dread expressed in the alienation and fragmentation of James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*.<sup>21</sup> This is the biting irony in W.E.A Adams' *Memoirs of a Social Atom*: "I call myself a Social Atom - a small speck on the surface of society. The term indicates my insignificance".<sup>22</sup> The difference between Blake's pantheistic celebration of the communal self in *Jerusalem*, and the troubled, problematic individualism of later nineteenth-century works occurs because the human horizon has been transformed by the 1860s. As Charles Taylor puts it, the embodiment of self had undergone a "subjectivist twist".<sup>23</sup>

In the Secular Self chapter, the concept of the Universal self is examined in relation to Blake and the nineteenth century, building on the aesthetic, secular and symbolic cultural contexts already established. William Blake holds a unique place in Victorian literature's tug-of-war between social atomism and individualism. The intimacy of the individual's response to Blake, and the personal inflection of political concerns, is examined in the *Interpreters* section of *Secular Self*. The interpreters of Blake included

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21 James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880). Hereafter this text will be referred to as *City of Dreadful Night*, followed by page number(s).

22 W.E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1903), p.xiii.

23 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of modern identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.416.

in this section are Alexander Gilchrist, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, James Thomson, Moncure Conway, William James Linton and Joseph Skipsey.

In the bibliographical texts section, the illusions of the poet-editors and the shortcomings of the textual critics are re-examined. Blake is constantly being reformed at the bibliographical borderline between materiality and textuality. This is acutely true of Blake's nineteenth-century reception history, which has been radically changed by the infiltration of cultural theory into bibliographical practice. Bibliography can no longer act in a state of immunity to the processes of social and cultural historiography. The text has been re-articulated as equally the product of reception as it is of conception. Bibliography at its most inventive juxtaposes historical objectivity with immediate subjectivity.

The way in which the challenge of "subjective objectivity" was met by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Swinburne will be examined in the chapter devoted to the editing of Blake's work by these poet-editors. A consideration of the alternative editorial paradigms applied to Blake's works by the aesthetically motivated poet-editors and the pragmatically devoted textual critics will ensue. What will emerge is a text that is in constant fluxuation throughout the nineteenth century. Jerome McGann describes the book as existing in a state of constant critical incompleteness, the text possessing the continuous potential of mutability.<sup>24</sup> The implicit question is: how does the bibliographic scholarship achieved by Keynes, Bentley and notably Erdman square with

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24 Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p.9: "The textual condition's only immutable law is the law of change. [...] The law of change declares that these histories will exhibit a ceaseless process of textual of textual developments and mutation – a process which can only be arrested if all the textual transformations of a particular work fall into nonexistence. To study texts and textualities, then, we have to study these complex (and open-ended) histories of textual change and variance". Hereafter, this work will be referred to as *Text. Cond.*, followed by page number(s).



the idea of reading as textually or culturally produced? Joseph Viscomi was, in 1982, setting the stage for a unique answer, by asking this question in a productive (literally) form: “Under what conditions did Blake’s works come to be?”<sup>25</sup>

In the concluding chapter of the section concerning bibliographical texts, Viscomi’s question takes on both material and symbolic connotations. He opened out the taken-for-granted paradigm of production. The illuminated books, despite the dominant, almost paranoid hand of Blake in their unilateral production, change – constantly. McGann gives us a bibliographical spin on Foucault’s archeology of knowledge, peeling back the spine of the book, dissecting the page, to reveal the epistemology of cultural production. But once we begin to uncover the text in relation to William Blake’s works in the Victorian period, the theory of an ever-producing, self-inducing text is confronted by its own historical being. The story of William Blake in the nineteenth century remains a peculiarly bibliographical history. Although scholarship is uncovering more and more evidence of media variation in the earlier posthumous transmission of Blake’s works, the impact of Blake’s reputation is embroiled in the Victorian conception of the book. Whereas McGann has described the text as a collection of unstable variants,<sup>26</sup> the Victorians saw the book as a still refuge of certainty.

The third and final section of this thesis reads the bibliographical productions of Victorian Blake criticism as aesthetic “crystallizations”.<sup>27</sup> Walter Benjamin describes this crystallisation as a “constructive” moment in materialistic historiography. From this

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25 Joseph Viscomi, “The Workshop” in *Studies in Romanticism* 21:3 (1982), pp.404 – 9 (p.404).

26 “If we define a text as words in a certain order, then we have to say that the ordering of the words in every text is *in fact*, at the factive level, unstable. No text, either conceptually or empirically, can have the ‘ordering of its words’ defined or specified as invariant” (*Text. Cond.*, p.185).

27 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp.245 - 55 (p.254). For further discussion see Forest Pyle in *Ideology of the Imagination: subject and society in the discourse of romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.25.

perspective, the “aesthetic productions” of nineteenth-century Blake facsimiles and forgeries crystallise like a string of pearls: the gems of cultural production, connected to each other but also to an original moment, each still an unique artefact created out of a specific historical moment.

Benjamin’s theory of technical reproducibility furnishes the study of Blake in the nineteenth century with a link between the pragmatics of textual reproduction and the aesthetic theories that were springing up contemporaneously. Morris Eaves’ exegesis of Blake’s anti-institutional and anti-mechanical aesthetics enables Benjamin’s aesthetic ideology to be honed to the specifics of Blake’s craft, and the technical denigration of that craft in reproduction.<sup>28</sup> Benjamin posits the theory that mechanised methods of reproduction deprecate art, diminishing authenticity and placing art into the realm of profanity: “One might subsume the eliminated element in the term ‘aura’ and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art”.<sup>29</sup>

Benjamin ties the falling away of ritualistic productive techniques to the rise of the new religion of art. The argument of Benjamin’s study revolves around an extreme reaction of art to technology, a reaction involving the expulsion from art of both socio-political intent and theological content. In relation to the nineteenth-century reception of Blake, this position can only partially explain the prism of politics, mysticism, progressive media techniques, individualism and artisan endeavour that gives us the image of Blake as an aesthetic icon. However, Benjamin’s reading of nineteenth-century aesthetics is

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28 Morris Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: art and industry in the age of Blake* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

29 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp.211 – 44, (p.215). Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Work of Art*.

apposite in its emphasis upon the aura of the object, on the longing for originality that accompanies the secular cult of beauty. The cultural value placed on the media of art in the nineteenth century is interwoven with a state of secular-mysticism. In the second half of the chapter examining facsimiles, forgeries, and fakes, a case will be made for the Victorian social and cultural regeneration of art by creative charlatans, knowingly utilising Blake's works for their own political and cultural purposes. The pamphlet of the *Address on the Opening of the New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society* indulges in aesthetic and cultural shamanism, encouraging the collusion of mysticism and secularism, and introducing "Blake the fake" to an unsuspecting public.

Walter Benjamin's consideration of art and audience in the thrall of technology helps us to understand the ideological dice being thrown with Blake's entrance into reproductive technology through photolithography etc. In the last section of the thesis, the fear held by even radical aestheticians, such as Swinburne, towards the homogenised mass of uncritical and unrefined public perception, directed at the spiritual complexity of Blake, is examined from a number of historical and theoretical positions. These include John Camden Hotten's levelling voice, stating that a literary free-market (meaning one free from copyright restrictions) equals free-speech, a mark of a literary democracy; Paul Ricoeur's consideration of reader response as semiotic catalyst; and Benjamin's prophecy of the apperceptive masses.

The final picture will feature an aesthetic dispersal into secular culture of a political and cultural imagination that could not and would not be tied to any one specific group. The circulation of Blake's texts at any given cultural moment involves both innovation and intervention. In this thesis I hope to demonstrate that Blake's nineteenth-century reputation has been unnecessarily curtailed, through an understandable, but shortsighted concentration on book length studies. As an adjunct to this point, genealogies that

critically cauterise the major volumes of Gilchrist and Swinburne, to the exculsion of the broad base of Victorian interest in Blake, are proven to be both partial and misleading. This broad-base of Blake's nineteenth-century reception is marked by diversity, particularly with regard to print and periodical publication, and in turn this diversity of "low" culture infiltrates the "high" culture of the Pre-Raphaelite book. Within this low/high circuit of culture, the persistence of certain anachronistic models, such as mystical correspondence, avail themselves to the recovery and celebration of Blake as a figure of alternative culture. Finally, the recent return to bibliography can alert us to the complex intersections of nineteenth-century editorial practice with these broader cultural movements.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Outside of the Book*

William Blake died on August 12th 1827: a simple death in a simple room.<sup>30</sup> The simplicity of Blake's death is not matched by a simple afterlife of critical acclaim. According to an apocryphal story recorded by both James King and Peter Ackroyd, George Richmond closed Blake's eyes "to keep the vision in".<sup>31</sup> The shutting in of Blake's vision at point of death serves as a double-edged metaphor: an extraordinary poetic and social vision is preserved, but at the same time cut off from future communion in the world. Blake's final vision – the meaning of his works and the systematic complexity (or otherwise) of his philosophy and symbolism within those works - remains a debated point. What is certain is that in death Blake's life and works would embark on the kind of fantastical, complex and "visionary" journeys that would not have looked out of place in one of Blake's "Memorable Fancies" from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

Since Deborah Dorfman's *Blake in the Nineteenth Century*, a steady stream of articles concerning nineteenth-century periodicals, pamphlets, reviews, and personal letters has augmented twentieth-century knowledge of Blake's posthumous reputation. This work often filters through in a couple of tantalising paragraphs in the "Minute Particulars" section of *Blake: an Illustrated Quarterly*. Or illuminating lists, such as Suzanne Hoover's, that revealed, confirmed and consolidated interest in Blake from such

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30 For twentieth-century descriptions of William Blake's death, see Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake* (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1927), p.317; James King, *William Blake: his life* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), pp.228 - 229; Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), pp.366 – 367.

31 G.E. Bentley in *Blake Records Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.87, describes Sir Arthur Richmond telling this story to Ruthven Todd: "Eighteen-year-old George Richmond came in just after Blake died and 'closed the poet's eyes and kissed Blake in death' (*BR*, 343). Sir Arthur Richmond (1879 – 1968) told Ruthven Todd that his grandfather closed Blake's eyes 'to keep the vision in'. This

nineteenth-century luminaries as Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, Walt Whitman and Herman Melville.<sup>32</sup> In the last thirty years, critical commentaries on Blake's nineteenth-century reputation that may be counted as substantial (25 pages or more) equal two. Suzanne Hoover's "Blake in the Wilderness" re-examines the "quiet" interregnum between 1827 and 1863, and finds not so much a wilderness but a frontier, already populated by pioneers in Blake's cause, particularly in America.<sup>33</sup> A special edition of the *Blake Newsletter* entitled "Blake Among Victorians"<sup>34</sup> consists of six articles in all, four of which are critical commentaries on Victorian critics of Blake, and two of which are reproductions of Victorian writings on Blake. Suzanne Hoover looks at the public response to the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *Life*,<sup>35</sup> and provides a list of contemporary reviews and articles of the biography, accumulated from Dorfmann. Hoover's "Fifty Additions" and a Bentley citation. Morton Paley provides a similar service as regards the reception of Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay*, finding both fear and discernment directed at the visionary aggression of Swinburne's Blake.<sup>36</sup> Frances Carey gives momentum to the importance of marginalia as critical process, describing how James Smethan visually monumentalised his copy of Gilchrist's *Life*.<sup>37</sup> It is opportune to note here the visual homage that was paid to Blake inside and outside of the Fine Art Gallery, such as the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition of 1876.

There are numerous references to Fine Art interest in Blake throughout the nineteenth century. Suzanne Hoover has estimated that before Gilchrist's *Life* was published in

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anecdote was first cited by Ruthven Todd in *Blake Newsletter* 6 (1972), p.24. The *Blake Records Supplement* will hereafter be referred to as *BRS*.

32 Suzanne R. Hoover, "Fifty Additions to Blake Bibliography: further data for the study of his reputation in the nineteenth century" in *Blake Newsletter* 5:3 (1971 – 1972), pp.167 – 172.

33 Suzanne R. Hoover, "William Blake in the Wilderness: a closer look at his reputation in the nineteenth century" in *William Blake: essays in honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes*, eds Morton D. Paley and Michael Philips (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp.310 – 348.

34 *Blake Newsletter* 8:1 – 2 (1974), a single issue entitled "Blake Among Victorians". This issue will be referred to in the following discussion as *BAV*.

35 Suzanne R. Hoover, "The Public Reception of Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* in *BAV*, pp.26 – 31.

36 Morton D. Paley, "The Critical reception of *A Critical Essay*" in *BAV*, pp.32 – 7.

37 Frances A. Carey, "James Smethan (1821 – 1889) and Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*" in *BAV*, pp.17 – 25.

1863, Blake's work potentially had an audience of millions through art exhibitions in Manchester, the Manchester Art-Treasures Exhibition (1857) and London, the International Exhibition (1862). Blake is entered in Francis A. Palgrave's *Handbook to the International Exhibition*. There is also a review in the *Athenaeum* stating that Blake's "[...] transcendental fancies are freely seen". William Bell Scott's "The Blake Catalogue" for the Burlington exhibition was published in the *Academy*.<sup>38</sup>

As well as public exhibitions, there are textual illustrations before 1863, such as those identified by G.E. Bentley in 1838 in *The Pictorial Edition of the Book of Common Prayer*, indebted to Blake's designs to Blair's Grave.<sup>39</sup> Interest in Blake not just as an artist but as an illustrator is evident early in Blake's Victorian reception. Because of the nature of the illustrator's art, which focuses on drawing, Blake's influence is often most palpable in sketchbook jottings and copyings, or marginalia such as Smethan's. The Jerusalem copyings of Theodore von Holst, Fuseli's pupil,<sup>40</sup> is another example. In the 1880s, an attempt to elevate illustrating and engraving to the status of fine art was embarked upon in the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*. William Blake was well represented. For example, in 1887 Blake made at least five separate appearances, in reproduced work or commentary upon that work.<sup>41</sup> Even when the essay was not

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38 Suzanne R. Hoover, "Pictures at the Exhibition" in *Blake Newsletter* 6:1 (Summer 1972), pp.6 – 12. In a footnote Hoover extrapolates the figures of attendance for the two exhibitions: "One million fifty-five thousand people attended the Exhibition at Manchester. I have no attendance figure for the International Exhibition, but I think it fair to assume that it would have been at least double that for Manchester, considering the difference in location, the broader nature of the London exhibition and the fact that it lasted two weeks longer than that at Manchester", p.6. n.3. Francis A. Palgrave, *Handbook to the Fine Art Collection in the International Exhibition of 1862* (London & Cambridge, 1862), pp.65 – 6. Anon., "International Exhibition: the English water-colour pictures" in *Athenaeum* 1803 (17 May, 1862), p.663. William Bell Scott, 'The Blake Catalogue' in *Academy* IX (1876), p.385. There is a review of the exhibition by J. Beavington Atkinson, "Exhibition of Works of William Blake, Burlington Club", in *Portfolio* 7 (1876), pp.69 – 71.

39 G.E. Bentley, "Echoes of Blake's Grave Designs in 1838" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 12:3 (1978 – 79), pp.207 – 9.

40 Max Browne, "A Blake Source for von Holst" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 29:3 (1995 - 96), pp.78 – 81.

41 The following were included in *Century Guild Hobby Horse* 2 (1887): "The Life Mask of William Blake", opp.p.29; Herbert Horne, "Commentary on the Life Mask of William Blake", p.29; "A Facsimile of William Blake's Sibylline Leaf on Homer and Virgil", p.113; Herbert Horne, "Note on A Facsimile of William Blake's Sibylline Leaf on Homer and Virgil", p.115; "William Blake's Marriage of Heaven and

specifically directed to discussion of Blake, his influence is pervasive. John Ruskin tells us how his own facsimilist and illustrator, Arthur Burgess, came to purchase Blake's work: "He [Burgess] was again in London after that and found there and possessed himself of some of Blake's larger drawings [...] They were the larger and more terrific of these [the Blake drawings originally sold to Ruskin by George Richmond] which poor Arthur had now again fallen in with – especially the Nebuchadnezzar – and a wonderful witch with attendant owls and grandly hovering birds of night unknown to ornithology".<sup>42</sup> The Bohemian, Blake inspired illustrations by John Trivett Nettleship for Arthur W.E. O'Shaughnessy *Epic of Women and Other Poems* carried Ruskin's fascination with Blake's figurative exuberance into a new era.<sup>43</sup>

In "Blake Among Victorians", the Irish creative debt to Blake is also acknowledged in Michael Tolley's note on John Todhunter's poems, "Lost" and "Found".<sup>44</sup> John Todhunter was Professor of English Literature at Alexandra College, Dublin, and part of the other, Irish, brotherhood that adopted Blake as a seminal spirit in the nineteenth century. "The Brotherhood" consisted of John Butler Yeats (William Butler's father), Edwin Ellis, John Trivett Nettleship and George Wilson.<sup>45</sup> The group was important in spreading knowledge of Blake in Irish intellectual circles, avoiding "[...] dogmatic inbreeding by communicating its enthusiasms to outsiders, especially Yeats's school friends from Trinity College Dublin days, Edward Dowden and John Todhunter, who as

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Hell, now first printed from the engraved original", pp.135 – 157. Despite the inference of the title, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is actually reproduced in letterpress.

42 John Ruskin, "Arthur Burgess" in *Century Hobby Horse* 2 (1887), pp.46 – 53 (p.52).

43 Morton D. Paley, "John Trivett Nettleship and His 'Blake Drawings'" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 14:4 (1981), pp.185 – 194. Paley tells us that "[...] by the time Nettleship met Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he had already acquired a Blakean pictorial vocabulary", p.185.

44 Michael J. Tolley, "John Todhunter: a forgotten debt to Blake" in *BAV*, pp.15 – 16.

45 James McCord discusses the group of four intellectuals and artists, and Blake's influence upon them in "John Butler Yeats, 'The Brotherhood' and William Blake" in *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 86 (1983 – 1985), pp.10 – 32.



teachers then shared their insights with students and friends” (McCord, “The Brotherhood”, p.11). Todhunter delivered a lecture series on Blake between 1872-1874, which is edited by Ian Fletcher.<sup>46</sup> Fletcher also reproduces in the same issue Malcolm Kingsley Macmillan’s imagined and unfinished dialogue between Wordsworth and Blake, in which Blake calls Wordsworth “A renegade, a presumer, a blasphemmer”.<sup>47</sup>

Taken together, short articles in the last thirty years concerning Blake’s reputation between 1828 – 1900 make up a considerable body of work. John Todhunter makes a reappearance, this time as a parody writer of Blake, translating Blake’s “The Fly” “[...]into eleven lines of Catullan hendecasyllabics under the hackneyed but appropriate title ‘Carpe Diem’”.<sup>48</sup> Parody has an early presence in Blake’s nineteenth-century reception history, a pipe-obsessed autograph parody of the “Introduction” to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* being written in the leaf of copy E, and recorded in the Sotheby’s sale catalogue of 1852.<sup>49</sup> Other articles on, and notices of, Blake in the nineteenth century: Benjamin Disraeli’s letter to Anne Gilchrist, setting the record straight about the treasures that did not lie hidden in his father’s. Isaac Disraeli’s collection;<sup>50</sup> Samuel Palmer’s letter, dated by Raymond Lister at around 1849, illuminating Blake’s fidelity to drawing and the “[...] first inventive lines”;<sup>51</sup> R.H.Hutton’s review in the *Spectator* of Gilchrist’s *Life*, highlighting the mathematical

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46 “John Todhunter’s Lectures on Blake, 1872 – 1874”, ed. Ian Fletcher in *BAV*, pp.4 – 14.

47 Malcolm Kingsley Macmillan, “A Dialogue between Blake and Wordsworth, Written in Rome before 17 April 1889 and Left Unfinished”, ed. Ian Fletcher in *BAV*, pp.38 – 41.

48 Vivian Mercier, “Blake Echoes in Victorian Dublin” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 11:1 (1977), p.32.

49 G.E. Bentley, “A Piper Passes: the earliest parody of Blake’s ‘Songs of Innocence’” in *Notes & Queries* 209 (1964), pp.418 - 19 (p.419): “The chief effort of the parodist seems to have been to work some form of the word ‘pipe’ into each line. In this he has beaten Blake all hollow, twenty-seven ‘pipes’ to ten. He has given us a whole host of flutes, a positive piper posse”.

50 Raymond Lister, “A Letter from Benjamin Disraeli to Anne Gilchrist” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 14:2 (1980), p.99.

51 Raymond Lister, “Two Drawings and a Letter from Samuel Palmer” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 6:1 (1972), pp.53 – 54.

terminology that Hutton had used elsewhere;<sup>52</sup> David Groves unearthing of early Scottish interest in Blake in the *Edinburgh Evening Post* and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*;<sup>53</sup> and more early evidence of the Swedenborgian Blake and the insane Blake.<sup>54</sup>

The periodical in the nineteenth century has been described as “[...] self-confessedly historical, contingent, looking backward and forward, with a historical identity”. constituting “[...] a powerful antidote to the apparent self-containment or isolation suggested by the subsequent form of book publication”.<sup>55</sup> Blake’s reception history in the nineteenth century straddles both the vibrant immediacy of the journal and the holistic *gravitas* of the book. As Michael Harris puts it, the periodical is a touchstone of the book: “[...] a point at which a whole range of interests coincide and are brought into sharp relief”.<sup>56</sup> Lee Erickson describes the impact of the periodical on the book as a transition from the monumental to the momentary: “As the market for literature expanded once technological developments in printing made books much cheaper, periodicals dominated the reading public’s consumption of literature and tempted authors to write for the immediate moment instead of futurity and for the many instead of the few”.<sup>57</sup> Contiguous with the moment of technologically enabled writing is the Romantic zenith, the redefinition of literature as imaginative writing.<sup>58</sup> The technological and the imaginative were to work both in harmony and antipathy in the reproduction of Blake in the nineteenth century.

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52 Robert H. Tenner, “The Authorship of the *Spectator* Review of Gilchrist” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 13:1 (1979), pp.33 – 35.

53 David Groves, and “Blake and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* – with a Note on Thomas de Quincey” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 25:3 (1991/1992), pp.133 – 135. “Blake and the *Edinburgh Evening Post*” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 26:2 (1992), p.51- 52.

Jenijoy La Belle, “Blake’s Insanity: an unrecorded early reference” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 15:2 (1981), pp.180 – 181.

55 Laurel Brake, “Writing, Cultural Production, and the Periodical Press in the Nineteenth Century” in *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. J.B Bullen (London: Longman, 1997), pp.54 – 72 (p.54).

56 Michael Harris, “Periodicals and the Book Trade” in *Development of the English Book Trade, 1700 – 1899*, eds Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Press, 1981), pp.66 – 94 (p.66).

57 Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English literature and the industrialization of publishing, 1800 – 1850* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1996), p.171.

58 Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism: reading as social practice, 1780 – 1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.260.

One area of publishing that increased at an exponential rate with printing technology was the traditional domain of religious works, its eighteenth-century popularity reinvigorated through techniques of mass-production. Robert Altick relates the explosion in religious literature, propagated through bodies such as the Religious Tract Society, to the rise of literacy in the nineteenth century: “Simply by making the printed word more available the religious literature societies stimulated the spread of literacy”.<sup>59</sup> The sheer volume of religious periodicals circulated in the nineteenth century makes the Bible seem like big business. Gerald Parsons comment that “[t]he scale of such publishing was remarkable”<sup>60</sup> is confirmed by the statistics: the Religious Tract Society produced as many as 33 million items a year during the 1860s, in 1841 the Wesleyan Methodist Book Room issued 1,300,000 items.<sup>61</sup> Of course, as well as economic factors, there are powerful discourses being worked out in the dissemination of this literature. Religion and technology come together in the nineteenth century to spread the word through new media.

By the mid-point of the nineteenth century, both religion and art had been at the vortex of debates which challenged the homogeneity of theology<sup>62</sup> and aesthetics.<sup>63</sup> It has been

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59 Robert Altick, *The English Common Reader: a social history of the mass reading public 1800 – 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p.103.

60 Gerald Parsons, “Victorian Religion, Paradox and Variety” in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Traditions*, ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp.1 – 13 ( p.7).

61 See Patrick Scott, “The Business of Belief: the emergence of religious publishing” in *Sanctity and Secularity: the church and the world*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), pp.213 – 224 (p.217).

62 For a survey of Victorian theological debates surrounding tradition and scripture see Bernard Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: a survey from Coleridge to Gore* (London: Longman, 1980). Reardon describes the nineteenth century as the birth of the contemporary world “[...] with all its turbulence and ceaseless change”, p.1, and cites the “cultural revolution” of the nineteenth century as an era “[...] of informed thought about the Christian religion, its aims and its truth”, p.2. Gerald Parsons states the paradox of Victorian religious belief: “Victorian religion at once presents us with a profoundly and fundamentally paradoxical and ambiguous combination of crisis and confidence, faith and doubt, revival and decline” (“Business of Belief”, p.5).

63 For further discussion see Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: poetry, poetics and politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.21, and Hilary Fraser, *Beauty and Belief: aesthetics and religion in Victorian literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.2ff.

said that “[d]oubt is ubiquitous in the discourse of the Victorians”.<sup>64</sup> In both art and religion, orthodoxy had received, and was about to receive, stern challenges from various quarters. Within the established Anglican Church, the Oxford Movement,<sup>65</sup> initiated by the 1832 Reform Act and the attempt of the Whig government of 1833 to rationalise the Church of Ireland through the Irish Temporalities Act,<sup>66</sup> was a strange amalgam of reaction and revolution. The return to Catholic doctrine instigated by Newman and Keble aimed “[...] to recall men to ancient truths that had for too long been overlooked or had ceased, in an age of indifference, to stir the pulses of faith” (Reardon, *Religious Thought*, p.66). Time and again in the Victorian period, art and religion make an uneasy pact with the past, searching for something that seemed to be lost. Romanticism dealt in spirit: Stephen Prickett talks of Coleridge as *spiritualising* the theology of his age.<sup>67</sup> From this spiritual surge, grew an aestheticism that embraced both theology and poetics. Re-articulated through the 1990s model of cultural exchange, nineteenth-century religion “[...] was the crucial mediator between the cultural and political-economic spheres in England, and the Romantics directed their creative energies toward intervention in that arena”.<sup>68</sup> The church is an aesthetic spectacle for a lay audience, an amphitheatre of mass communication that was already being threatened from within by the dissemination of new communicative media.

The vitality of the religious tract in this period is as much a result of the changing media of literary production, as it is a response to the message contained in the tract. The rising

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64 Lance St John Butler, *Victorian Doubt: literary and cultural discourse* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p.9.

65 See Gerald Parsons, “Reform, Revival and Realignment: the experience of Victorian Anglicanism” in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Traditions*, pp.14 – 66.

66 R.W. Davis, “The Whigs and Religion and Irreligion” in *Victorian Society: essays in honour of R.K. Webb*, eds R.W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadler (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.29 – 50.

67 Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: the tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.67.

68 Robert M. Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: religious politics in English literature, 1781 – 1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.4. See also Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion*, p.68.

popularity of the illustrated periodical is a case in point.<sup>69</sup> The fervour with which illustrated and religious periodicals were devoured in the nineteenth century sets an interesting scene for the “break-through” biography of Alexander Gilchrist, which, as we will see, contains elements of both. Blake’s impact in the nineteenth century was largely due to the ‘splendid isolation’ of the book,<sup>70</sup> i.e. the 1863 edition of Gilchrist, but his reputation’s momentum, building up to that reproduction in book form, came through the variety and flexibility of the periodical. This trait of being in the *here and now*, a modern fusion of styles and contexts, is sharply contrasted with belonging *there*, a visionary plucked out of historical obscurity and preserved in a gorgeous book. Blake’s paradox of being here but belonging there endures throughout the nineteenth century. Reproductive media is one area in which Blake is both a vehicle of nostalgia and a catalyst for invention. The inheritors of the artisan world Blake inhabited would find themselves both prey to technology and auguries of new advances in populist expression. For example, graphic journalism from the 1830s onwards experienced a rapid and vortical cultural evolution.<sup>71</sup> The craft of wood engraving primed the graphic and printing industries for technological advances that would meld craft to mechanical

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where the criticism of Keble and Newman is described as speaking of the Church “[...] in terms that are ultimately those of a work of art, and of the relationship between artist and public”.

69 Harry G. Aldis (revised by John Carter and E.A. Creitchley), “Book Illustration” in *Reader in the History of Books and Printing*, ed. Paul A. Winckler (Englewood: Colorado: Indian Head, 1978), pp.113 - 126 (pp.120 – 121): “In the nineteenth century the use of illustrations in books of every kind greatly increased. [...] Soon after 1830 the field for wood engraving was enlarged by the use of illustrations in weekly journals, and additional importance was given to this movement by the founding of the *Illustrated London News* in 1842”. For a statistical discussion of the innovation and popularity of illustrated periodicals see James Barnes, “Depression and Innovation in the British and American Book Trade. 1819 – 1939” in *Economics of the British Book Trade, 1605 – 1939*, eds Michael Harris and Robin Myers (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1985), pp.209 – 231. For example, *The Illustrated London News*, first published in 1842, increased its sales from 25,000 to 60,000 in the first year of publication (pp.216 – 217).

70 David Bland is only partially correct in his assessment of Blake: “Blake belongs to no century. He seems to have influenced strangely little and to have had strangely little influence on his contemporaries.[...] While Blake was going his own way in splendid isolation, a gradual transformation was taking place in commercial book illustration”, *The Illustration of Books* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), pp.68 – 70.

71 Celina Fox, *Graphic Journalism in England During the 1830s and 1840s* (London: Garland, 1988), p.26: “The development of wood engraving during the first half of the nineteenth century provided the basic technical conditions from which graphic journalism could grow”.

product, and link the fate of the artisan-printer to that of the graphic designer.<sup>72</sup> As photolithography and electrotyping replaced simple lithographic methods in visual reproduction, so type-setting and manual compositing were superseded by stereotyping and, occasionally, electrotyping in the reproduction of the word.<sup>73</sup> Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* employed traditional craft and deployed technical innovation to produce a book both wise with age and astonishingly new. In the 1863 edition reproduction methods used include stereotyping (the text), wood-engraving (tailpieces based on *The Illustrations to the Book of Job* engraved by William James Linton), photolithography (facsimiles of *The Illustrations to the Book of Job*), kerography (a self-invented reproduction technique that Linton used to produce facsimile copies for tailpieces etc.), and relief etching (the plates pulled from Blake's originals for *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in Volume II). Added to this list can be the electrotypes used to produce the 1880 edition of the *Life*. As is self-evident, Gilchrist's *Life* cannot be easily placed as innovative or reactionary in the history of nineteenth-century print reproduction. It is itself a *mélange*. As far as reproductive media are concerned, nineteenth-century Blake would seem to be both avant-garde and anachronistic. Gilchrist's *Life* is the best known example of the technical eclecticism, spanning ages and traditions, that was to mark Blake's reception and textual transmission in the nineteenth century. Other examples include the facsimiles made by William Muir, mainly clustered around the 1880s, and produced by lithographic methods from zinc plates, and the "facsimile forgeries" of *There Is No Natural Religion* that Joseph Viscomi has identified, reproduced from relief plates (*IB*, p.198).

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72 Celina Fox writes in *Graphic Journalism*: "[...] the growth of a technology of wood engraving, the beginnings of a mechanised industry, though it was neither sudden nor comprehensive, changed the character of graphic journalism and altered the social framework of the people involved in its production" (p.26).

73 Allan C. Dooley, *Author and Printer in Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), p.59: "By mid-century, stereotyping was used in printing almost all of England's newspapers and magazines. Soon it was routine in the larger publishing houses to stereotype their books – if not for the first impression, certainly for later ones; and if not for poetry, certainly for popular fiction".

Two names that link Blake to the fortunes of artisan and working class art in the later nineteenth century are those of William James Linton and Joseph Skipsey. Linton was an artisan engraver by profession, a political activist of a republican and chartist persuasion by vocation and has been described as a “[...] latter-day Blake”.<sup>74</sup> Joseph Skipsey was a coal-miner by profession and by birth (his father was shot dead intervening in a colliery dispute when he was four months old and he was working as a trapper by the time he was seven), and a poet by vocation.<sup>75</sup> Both men were involved in reproducing Blake for Victorian audiences: Linton as facsimilist for the 1863 and 1880 editions of Alexander Gilchrist’s *The Life of Blake* and Joseph Skipsey as the editor of William Blake’s poems for the Canterbury poets series.<sup>76</sup> Linton’s graphic reproductions of Blake serve as embellishments to a lavish production. Skipsey’s editorial work reconstitutes the body of Blake’s words for consumption in a populist market.<sup>77</sup> The contrast of literary media in which these working men transmit Blake’s work betrays a topsy-turvy reader democracy at play. Whilst enclosed in the book, Linton’s tailpieces and borders connected Blake’s images with a visual language of periodical resistance and dissidence, such as Linton’s own use of Blake’s images in relation to Republicanism. At the same time, Skipsey’s Blake, the popular poet, resided in political quietude. A strange contrast: the inexorable political activity of one working man against the political inertia of another, both promoting Blake in different ways, through different media and to a different literate class. Lyric individualism for the

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74 Robert F. Gleckner, “W.J. Linton, a Latter-day Blake” in *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 85 (1982), pp.208 – 227.

75 See Robert Spence Watson, *Joseph Skipsey, His Life and Works* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), p.14 – 16.

76 William Blake, *The Poems, with Specimens of Prose Writings, of William Blake* (London: Walter Scott [The Canterbury Poets], 1885). Hereafter this text will referred to as *Canterbury Blake*, followed by page number(s).

77 Sabine Haass describes the market for the Canterbury Poets in as the elusive group of newly-literate between the unskilled workers and the middle class in “Victorian Poetry Anthologies: their role and success in the nineteenth-century book market” in *Publishing History* 17 (1985), pp.51 – 64 (p.57).

popular reader clashes with communitarian vision at the heart of the PreRaphaelite project. New paths were being beaten out for the reception of Blake, ones in which, as Anne Janowitz puts it “[t]he history of liberalism and the history of romanticism are tied together through the voice of lyric individualism”. It is when Blake’s vision and voice come to be “[...] deployed through the poetic medium of print culture”, that technology throws up mutations, possibilities and blasphemous interpretations.<sup>78</sup> As Jon Klancher suggests, the rise in popular journals and popular literature is a conflation of energies.<sup>79</sup>

It is becoming clearer that as the visual language of nineteenth-century media is recovered and re-read, Blake’s presence will be rediscovered in more and more diverse arenas of Victorian political and cultural life. However, diversity of media, technique and context in the reproduction of Blake’s works in the nineteenth century is offset by continuity in theological individualism and political radicalism. In the nineteenth-century reception of Blake and his works, we find that geographical vicissitude is countered by continuity in religious dissent and political radicalism. Open-ended theological speculation in interpreting Blake is matched by political fervour in expressing his social vision.

Before examining those common themes, the nineteenth-century geographical diversity of Blake – particularly his American reception – needs to be reiterated. There is a Russian reference to Blake as early as 1834,<sup>80</sup> a German reference to Blake appears in

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Sabine Haass also notes that “[a]mong other series, the *Canterbury Poets* played an important part in the popularization of classical English literature”.

78 Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.13.

79 Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790 – 1832* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p.77.

80 G.E. Bentley, Jr., notes the reference in “The Vicissitudes of Vision: the first account of William Blake in Russian” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 10:4 (1977), pp.112 – 114. The article is anonymous, and printed in *Teleskop* (or *Telescope*), published by Nicolai Nazezhdin. Entitled “Artist-Poet-Sumassheshii: zhizn Vil’yama Bleka (“Artist-Poet-Madman: Life of William Blake”), the anonymous author manages to both adapt Blake’s life and work to the extent that “differences of past, present and



1835<sup>81</sup> and the earliest Australian reference is dated at 1868.<sup>82</sup> Some of the earliest reproductions of, and references to, Blake's works are to be found in American publications.<sup>83</sup> As with so many references to Blake in the English press of the 1830s and 1840s,<sup>84</sup> these references owe a great deal to Allan Cunningham's biographical notice (Hoover, "William Blake in the Wilderness", p.321), of Blake in *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors and Architects*,<sup>85</sup> which itself is fashioned on John T. Smith's account of Blake in *Nollekens and his Time*.<sup>86</sup> The nineteenth-century "internationalism" of William Blake is, I suspect, a seriously undervalued and undeveloped field. G.E. Bentley's assertion that "William Blake is essentially an

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future" (p.113) become confused and "to put Blake is placed in a much wider cultural and literary context"(p.113) than had previously been explored in English criticism. Other nineteenth-century Russian references to Blake are noted in Nicholas O. Warner, "Shaw, Tolstoy and Blake's Russian Reputation" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 17:3 (1983 – 84), pp.102 –104. Warner notes that Blake's reputation was initially perpetuated through symbolist circles: "[...] however, the references to Blake in nineteenth-century Russia, as throughout the rest of Europe, were few and far between. It is possible, though, that Konstantin Bal'mont, the symbolist poet who first translated Blake's verse into Russian, may have mentioned the English poet on one his visits to Tolstoy's estate at Yasnaya Polyana. If he had, then Tolstoy would have been exposed to a Blake significantly sentimentalized and distorted along Russian symbolist decadent lines. This is the Blake who appears in the Bal'mont translations and in one of Bal'mont's own belletristic books, as well as in an article by Z. A. Vengerova, 'William Blake: The Forefather of English Symbolism,' that was first published in a well-known literary journal and later as a chapter in Venegrova's book on English poetry". p.102.

81 Dr G. K. Nagler, "Blake, William" in *Neunes Allgemeines Kunstler-Lexicon: Oder Nachrichten von dem Leben und den Werken der Maler, Bildhauser, Baumeister, Kupferstecher, Formschneider, Lithographen, Zeichner, Medailleure, Elfenbeinarbeiter, etc.* 25 vols (Munche, 1835), I, pp.519 – 22.

82 Anon., "Review. Mr Swinburne on William Blake" in *Argus* [Melbourne] 2 June 1868, pp.5 – 6.

83 These include the *American Monthly Magazine* and the *New Jerusalem Magazine* of 1832, in a treatise, for 'young readers', on the fine arts in 1833 in the widely read Atkinson's *Saturday Evening Post* in 1835, in Whittier's *Supernaturalism of New England* in 1847, in T.S. Arthur's *The Brilliant: A Gift Book* for 1850, and in Shearjashub Spooner's anecdotes of artists in 1853. These reproductions and references are listed in Suzanne Hoover, "William Blake in the Wilderness", pp.310 – 348. In Raymond H. Deck, "Unnoticed Printings of Blake's Poems" ten out of the twelve entries are American publications.

84 Many of these smaller citations and republications in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s are in biographical dictionaries or encyclopedias. They include Lydia Maria Child, "Good Wives No.1. – Mrs. Blake, wife of William Blake" in *Ladies Pocket Magazine* Part 2 (1833), pp.1 – 5. G.E. Bentley notes that "This account (with an unattributed engraving of 'The Fairy Funeral' is simply extracted from Cunningham" in G.E. Bentley, *Blake Books: annotated catalogues of the William Blake's writings in illuminated printings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p.781. Hereafter *Blake Books* will be referred to as *BB*, followed by page number(s). Allan Cunningham in his *Poems and Songs* hoped his fame would live on in his account of Blake, Flaxman and Burns, *Poems and Songs, with an introduction, glossary and notes by Allan Cunningham* (London: Bodley, 1847), p.lx (*BB*, p.787).

85 Allan Cunningham, "Life of Blake" in *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors and Architects* 6 vols (London: John Murray, 1830), II, pp.143 – 188. I will quote from the transcription in G.E. Bentley, *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). Hereafter *Blake Records* will be referred to as *BR*, followed by page number(s).

86 John Thomas Smith, *Nollekens and his Time* 2 vols (London: Henry Coburn, 1829). In *BR*, pp.455 – 476.

English phenomenon, strange and bewildering to his contemporaries. barely of interest beyond the English-speaking world until more than a century after his birth 1757” (Bentley, “Vicissitudes”, p.112) seems straightforward and self-evident. But the English-speaking world was itself a strange phenomenon, in the main divided geographically by the Atlantic, and connected by parallel journeys of self-discovery and popular self-determination.

From at least 1834 onwards, both Blake’s graphic and poetic work was being reproduced in the American republic. Illustrations taken from Blake’s designs to J.G. Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*<sup>87</sup> were “pirated” in *The People’s Almanac* for 1834 and 1836.<sup>88</sup> The narrative of the Revolted Negroes was originally conceived and executed in the 1790s as an elaborate cultural collaboration in the form of the book published by Joseph Johnson.<sup>89</sup> The book was a luxury product: “[...] two leatherbound, gold-toothed volumes with a total of eighty plates by well-known engravers” (Rubenstein and Camilla, “Revolted Negroes”, p.284). The graphic intensity of Blake’s interpretation transcends the heaviness and near-pomposity of the artefact. The images possess an ambiguity between realism and idealism that cuts deep into cultural practices and prejudice. Anne Mellor refutes Rubenstein’s and Townsend’s description of Blake as a positive portrayer of the Surinam slaves’ humanity. Mellor sees Blake as concurring in a

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87 J.G. Stedman. *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (London: J. Johnson, 1796).

88 See Thomas V. Lange, “Blake in American Almanacs” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 14:2 (Fall 1986), pp.94 -96.

89 For details of the production history of this book and Blake’s role in that production, see Anne Rubenstein and Camilla Townsend, “Revolted Negroes and the Devilish Principle: William Blake and conflicting visions of Boni’s wars in Surinam” in *Blake, Politics and History*, eds Jackie Di Salvo, G. A. Rosso and Christopher Z. Hobson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), pp.273 – 298.

patriarchal assimilation of cultural and racial difference.<sup>90</sup> Going against the grain of author (J.G. Stedman) and product (the 1796 book),<sup>91</sup> Blake produced a quality of design that fused photographic accuracy with imaginative impact. So much so that these designs can re-emerge in 1830s America as tourist trivia, and in 1990s Britain as signposts of a shared, multicultural history in David Dabydeen's *Slave Song*.<sup>92</sup> Blake's design is both cultural and political. The reception of his work echoes the inception of that work in subtle and unexpected ways.

The confluence of art and politics in the interpretation and reproduction of Blake's works in the nineteenth century is matched by the confluence of religion and art in that interpretation and reproduction. Again, there is Anglo-American exchange and influence in operation here. American Swedenborgians were among the first to publish Blake's poetry,<sup>93</sup> as were English Swedenborgians. James John Garth Wilkinson, the first editor of Blake (Hoover, "William Blake in the Wilderness", p.329), provides the link between English Swedenborgianism and the American evolution of that tradition into Transcendentalism. Although there is evidence that Blake found his way into American Swedenborgian circles without the aid of Wilkinson,<sup>94</sup> Wilkinson's edition of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* did have a direct influence in the circle of American Transcendentalists.<sup>95</sup> Among those who owned a copy of the Wilkinson

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90 Anne Mellor, "Blake, Gender and Imperial Ideology: a response" in *Blake, Politics and History*, pp.351 – 3 (p.353).

91 "Captain Stedman's political desire to see slavery continue (albeit in a gentler form) clashed with the goals of the slaves and rebels of whom he wrote; significantly it also clashed with the liberal world view of his publisher and the radical Christian imagination of his illustrator. Each of these was devoted to a different vision of the future, yet none succeeded in imposing his own vision on history" (Rubenstein and Townsend, 1998, p.273).

92 David Dabydeen, *Slave Song* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1984).

93 S. Foster Damon, "Some American References to Blake before 1863" in *Modern Languages Notes* 14 (1930), pp.365 – 70 cites "The Lamb" from *Songs of Innocence* published in the Swedenborgian *New Jerusalem Magazine* as the earliest publication of Blake's poetry in America.

94 Raymond H. Deck, Jr., "An American Original: Mrs Colman's illustrated printings of Blake's poems, 1843 – 44" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 11:1 (1977), pp.4 – 18.

95 Edward J. Rose, "The 1839-Wilkinson Edition of Blake's Songs in Transcendental America" in *Blake Newsletter* 4 (1971), pp.79 - 81.

*Songs* are figures at the hub of both American Transcendentalism and American literary life. Emerson inscribed a copy: "R.W. Emerson/ for his friend/ E.P.P.", or Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, whose bookshop was a meeting place for the "Transcendental Club" in the 1830s and 1840s. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was to become Emily Dickinson's tutor, also possessed a copy (Rose, "1839 Wilkinson-edition", p.80). S. Foster Damon points out that the emphasis in American Swedenborgian and Transcendental criticism upon the visionary eccentricity of Blake is positive, rather than negative, because of the specifically mystical context in which they were read: "But nobody seems to have called him mad: Swedenborgianism had prepared America for such marvels" (Foster Damon, "Some American References", p.369).

Swedenborgianism and its generic origin, mysticism, are the strongest and most enduring foundation stones of the Blake's posthumous reception, spanning the whole spectrum of theological and aesthetic belief in the nineteenth century, from "card-carrying" members of the New Church to aesthetic dissenters such as Swinburne. During the 1840s, the Swedenborgian reception of Blake in America presages the marriage of mysticism and secular politics that would continue to resurface throughout the nineteenth century. The earliest known publication of Blake's poetry in America has been identified in the abolitionist journal, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. The editor was Lydia Maria Child, who had an active interest in Swedenborgianism.<sup>96</sup> The first Blake poem published in America was deliberately articulated within the abolitionist cause, prompting "[...]investigation of the racial and cultural issues surrounding Blake's introduction to an American readership" (Stauffer, *First Known Publication*, p.43). Morton D. Paley has documented the relationship between the late-

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96 Andrew M. Stauffer, "The First Known Publication of Blake's Poetry in America" in *Notes & Queries* n.s. 43.1 (1996), pp.41 – 43. The poems printed in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 1842 are, as given by Stauffer: "The Little Black Boy" (*Songs of Innocence*) in II:40 (10 March 1842), p.160; "The Chimney Sweeper" III:1 (9 June 1842); "Night" III:3 (June 23); "The Divine Image" III:7 (July 21); "A Dream" III:17 (September 29).

eighteenth-century New Church and the first abolitionist society, who aimed to set up a free colony in Sierra Leone. Blake would have had the opportunity to meet some of these early emancipators at the New Church General Conference in 1789.<sup>97</sup> Garth Wilkinson resurrected the idea of a Swedenborgian community in Africa in the 1890s.<sup>98</sup> The transatlantic link between Blake and the abolitionist cause was preserved in the 1860s and 1870s by Moncure Conway. Conway, the son of a southern plantation owner, grew increasingly critical of the system of slavery that he was surrounded by as a child.<sup>99</sup> His interest in Blake followed a review of Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay* in the *Fortnightly Review*,<sup>100</sup> and culminated in a serious appraisal of Blake's consanguinity with Eastern mysticism, describing him as "[...] one of the devoutest men of genius whom England has produced".<sup>101</sup> A point of interest in relation to the "racial and cultural issues" of Swedenborgianism is Conway's comment that slaves on his father's plantation had "[...] their own rudimental Swedenborgianism and Transcendentalism" (Conway, *Testimonies*, p.4). Another link in the chain of Blake and abolition is Phyllis Wheatley. Wheatley's "Hymn to the Morning" may have influenced Blake's "The Little Black Boy", each negotiating Christian ideologies of subjugation and deferred reward through "sunshine and shady groves".<sup>102</sup> Conway's own religious

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97 Morton D. Paley, "A New Heaven is Begun: William Blake and Swedenborgianism" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 13:2 (1979), pp.64 – 89: "Furthermore, many Swedenborgians shared another of Blake's deepest concerns – opposition to slavery. Swedenborg taught that the inhabitants of the interior of Africa had preserved a direct intuition of God, and as a result the first abolitionist society was founded by Swedenborgians in Norrköping in 1779. The founder of that group was one of the most active of European abolitionists, Charles Bernhard Wadström, and Wadström with another Swedish delegate, Augustus Nordenskjöld, attended the 1789 General Conference. Wadström and Nordenskjöld were deeply involved in a plan to set up a free community for whites and blacks on the west coast of Africa, and Blake can hardly have been unaware of (or uninterested in) this well publicized project" (p.65).

98 James John Garth Wilkinson, *The African and the True Christian Religion, His Magna Carta: a study in the writing of Emanuel Swedenborg* (London: James Speirs, 1892).

99 See Moncure Conway, *Testimonies Concerning Slavery* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1865).

100 Moncure Conway, "William Blake" in *Fortnightly Review* 3 (February 1868), p.216.

101 Moncure Conway, *Demonology and Devil Lore* 2 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1879), I, p.13.

102 See Lauren Henry, "'Sunshine and Shady Groves': what Blake's 'Little Black Boy' learned from African writers" in *Romanticism and Colonialism: writing and empire, 1780 – 1830* eds Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.67 – 86.

beliefs mirror the plurality of nineteenth-century theological enquiry, ranging from an interest in Eastern mysticism to the “spiritual architecture” of a Secularist chapel.<sup>103</sup>

Conway is not alone in marrying mysticism to secular thought in the nineteenth century. The poet laureate of secularism, also known as the poet of pessimism, was James Thomson, author of *The City of Dreadful Night*. Thomson wrote much on Shelley, and in doing so aligned himself with radical and atheistic thought. Thomson’s acronym when writing for the *National Reformer*, the broadsheet of the nineteenth-century freethought was “B.V.”, or Bysshe Vanolis, the surname being an anagram of Novalis and the first name being adopted from Shelley. This pairing might give us a clue to the combination of muscular atheism and mystical ardor that distinguishes Thomson’s writings. It is this intermixture that comes to the fore in his essay on Blake, published in serial form in the *National Reformer* in 1866.<sup>104</sup>

Conway and Thomson are indicative of the attraction Blake held to people whose political and religious beliefs found no easy expression in the mainstream of nineteenth-century knowledge. Blake’s quality of combining imagination and politics, freedom and necessity, art and mysticism, returns the dispossessed of the post-Enlightenment world to a forgotten tradition where poetics and politics, imagination and religion, went hand in hand. The relationship of Blake to mysticism has been well documented, and is a constant association throughout his nineteenth-century reception.<sup>105</sup> But Blake also

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103 See John d’Entremont, *Moncure Conway, 1832 – 1907: American abolitionist, spiritual architect of South Place, author of “The Life of Thomas Paine”* (the 58th Conway Memorial Lecture, December 1977, South Place Ethical Society).

104 James Thomson. [B.V.], “The Poems of William Blake” in *National Reformer* 7 (January, 14, 21, 28 and February 4, 1866), pp.22 – 3, 42 – 3, 52 – 4, 70 – 1.

105 Among twentieth-century studies of Blake and mysticism, S. Foster Damon’s investigations have been amongst the most influential. In *William Blake: his philosophy and symbols* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1924). Foster Damon states the importance of mysticism to Blake from the start: “The key to everything Blake wrote or painted lies in his mysticism” (p.1). The taxonomy of symbolism in Damon’s study draws out many references, parallels, and analogies within the mystical tradition and Blake’s works.

attracted attention from groups who would seem to reject any notion of a mystical otherness or a higher being. Blake's connection with the Secularists or freethinkers has been under-represented in the reception history of Blake's works.

Secularism, although not dissociated from the social phenomenon of dissipated, unarticulated loss of faith known as secularisation, is defined by its organisation and its vehement self-articulation during the nineteenth century.<sup>106</sup> The urban radicalism that had seriously begun to question the relationship of religion and humanity in the first forty or so years of the nineteenth century, was able to find a distinct identity in a national movement because of the tradition of freethought that united local groups. The term "Secularism" had been coined by George Jacob Holyoake to describe the freethinking infidel followers who organised their debates around his journal of freethought, *The Reasoner*. From this intellectual epicentre, Secularism articulated its beliefs, and was actively engaged in thinking, reading and talking about the ideas of atheism. In its tradition and its evolution, the Secular society had combined the pragmatics of political protest with the rigour of intellectual and theological enquiry, creating "[...] a movement with a double origin, a result of two forces, one intellectual, the other social".<sup>107</sup> The seriousness of Secularism's radical philosophy can be seen in some of the heavy-weight Enlightenment and Revolutionary writers and thinkers that can be traced as ancestors of the movement, including Augustus Comte, Thomas Paine,

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Kathleen Raine takes Blake deeper into the circle of hermetic knowledge in *Blake and Tradition* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1969), boldly stating that "[...] mythology, not history, is Blake's cosmos" (p.xxv). P. Berger in *William Blake: Poet and Mystic*, trans. Daniel H. Conner (London: Chapman & Hal, 1914) attempts to tie that mystical history to a "concretion of symbols" (p.91). Helen White in *The Mysticism of William Blake* (Wisconsin, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1927), astutely guards against Blake becoming a "[...]by-word for obscurity" (p.46)and contextualises mysticism within "[...]a definite tradition" (p.55).

106 See Susan Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief: atheists and agnostics in English society, 1850 – 1960* (London: Heinemann, 1977), p.10, and Edward Royle, *The Infidel Tradition from Paine to Bradlaugh* (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp.16 – 67.

107 John Eros, "The Rise of Organized Freethought in Mid-Victorian England" in *Sociological Review* 2:1 (1954), pp.98 – 120 (p.99).

Richard Carlile, and Robert Owen.<sup>108</sup> Many nineteenth-century freethinkers also held a common ancestry in artisan craft and the radical press. Literary output was combined with radical belief, producing poetic propaganda through the medium of the periodical and small press. An inordinate number of artisan printers were associated with the freethinkers. Both George Jacob Holyoake and his brother Austin worked as printers, Austin taking over the printing of *The National Reformer* in 1867. William Stewart Ross or “Saladin”, the editor of the *Secular Review*, worked in several publishing houses before establishing his own in 1872. Both Charles and John Watts worked as printers. Joseph Mazzini Wheeler worked as a designer in a lithographic printing office. George Standring, son of a joiner and wheelwright, “[...] devoted himself to publishing and journalism, using a printing press at his father’s works”.<sup>109</sup> Amidst the cut and thrust of Secularism’s political and anti-religious publishing, the mystical figure of Blake is memorialised by one of Secularism’s *cause célèbres*, George William Foote, the editor of the *Freethinker*. In his atheistic agitation, Foote deployed a mode of “cultural terrorism”<sup>110</sup> which was a direct amalgam of his secular beliefs and his literary pursuit. His 1875 article on Blake in the *National Reformer*, continued to challenge the cultural *status quo*, bringing literary vision into contact with political expediency: “Indeed, his [Blake’s] Republicanism was more pronounced and defiant than that of the practical *un-*visionary politicians who met at Johnson’s [the bookseller]; [...]. Readers will be pleased to hear that mystical Blake saved practical Paine’s life in all probability”.<sup>111</sup>

The beautiful balance of Foote’s mystical Blake and practical Paine betrays an unexpected equilibrium. Blake’s reception in the nineteenth century did not entail

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108 All are entries in Joseph Mazzini Wheeler’s *A Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of All Ages and Nations* (London: Progressive Publishing Company, 1889).

109 Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: popular freethought in Britain, 1866 – 1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp.92 – 106.

110 David Nash, *Blasphemy in Modern Britain: 1796 to the present* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp.107 – 166.

111 *The National Reformer*, 26 (February 21st 1875), p.115



mutual exclusivity between mysticism and progressivism. Blake is not seen by the Secularists as solely a visionary precursor of the modern state, nor did students of mysticism see in Blake only the purveyor of mystical and NeoPlatonic knowledge. However Foote's political acumen was also finely attuned to Blake's potential as an immediate and accessible populariser of iconoclastic imagination. Foote was an ardent freethinker and Secularist. He was tried in 1883 for blasphemy, in what was to become one of the most notorious blasphemy cases of the day. The issue was the *Freethinker*, a satirical vehicle of freethought, which used the respectability of the established church as a lampoon. Foote was indicted, as editor, together with Ramsey as publisher, and Kemp as printer in 1882.<sup>112</sup> It was particularly the inflammatory nature of the visual designs that caught the popular imagination. These follow the best traditions of radical satire, and David Nash has suggested that one of them, "I do set my bow in the cloud" – *Genesis ix., 13.* (*figure 1*) is a parody of Blake's *Ancient of Days* (Nash, *Blasphemy in Modern Britain*, p.113).

It would be tempting to conclude that it was not so much the interpreters that formed Blake, but Blake who shaped the interpreters, on both sides of the theological and political divide. However, the truth is that Blake *was* reformed in the nineteenth century, reproduced through a technological and cultural spectrum that both restored and desecrated his vision. Foote's 1880s explicit appropriation of Blake is a reverse refinement of Blake's early posthumous reception. Blasphemy is a cultural pressure point in Blake's reception history, conserving prejudice and exciting radicalism. The period immediately following Blake's death may, in terms of the critical reception and textual transmission of his works, be seen as a process of oil separating from water. The eccentric quirks and pious poverty of Blake's life took precedence over his more

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<sup>112</sup> Nicolas Walter, *Blasphemy: ancient & modern* (Rationalist Press Association, 1990), p.50.



"I DO SEE MY BOW IN THE CLOUD."--Genesis ix., 13.

*figure 1*

complex reaction to a changing world of political and philosophic revolution. An *ad hoc* bifurcation was adopted, whereby critics and commentators both circumscribed and extemporised, rather than addressing the complex facts of Blake in the context of eighteenth-century political revolution and religious dissent. Focusing and elaborating upon certain aspects of Blake's life turns the early years of his posthumous reputation into a peculiar and – on close focus – over-refined critical landscape.

However, even within the earliest posthumous biographies, there are signs that point towards the unique way in which Blake was to be a barometer of Victorian faith and doubt. For example, the first posthumous biographer of Blake, John Thomas Smith, insisted on the devotion of Blake to the Bible. There is undoubtedly truth in this assertion. But Smith curtails Blake's radical reading of the "Good Book", going out of his way to quell rumours of sympathy with a specific atheistic group: "[...] I have unspeakable pleasure in being able to state that though I admit he [Blake] did not for the last forty years attend any place of Divine worship yet he was not a Freethinker as some invidious detractors have thought proper to assert, nor was he ever in any degree irreligious. Through life his Bible was everything with him" (*BR.*, p.458). This initial posthumous comment shows the tug-of-war that surrounded Blake's memory between convention and radicalism. The rumour that has most persistently dogged Blake's reputation is that of madness. The "mad" label began the slow osmosis of attachment to Blake's name during his own lifetime. In his 1806 biographical notice, the sympathetic Benjamin Heath Malkin felt forced to quell the whispers of lunatic: "The sceptic and the rational believer, uniting their forces against the visionary, pursue and scare a warm and brilliant imagination with the hue and cry of madness".<sup>113</sup> The image that Malkin leaves us with is that of the philistine crucifixion of a generous and gentle genius. That is the

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113 Benjamin Heath Malkin, *A Father's Memoir of his Child*, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1806). *BR*, pp. 421 – 431, p.424.

image we are supposed to be left with. But if we step back from Blake, for one moment, to look at the persecutors described in Malkin's piece, we see that behind the mad Blake story is a far more dangerous discourse. That discourse is belief.

What Blake's religious beliefs were is hard to tie down to a specific religious group or theological stance. We know he believed in Jesus Christ, but whether as Muggletonian, Swedenborgian, Anabaptist or other, no conclusive proof has yet been furnished.<sup>114</sup>

Robert Ryan's thorough argument for Blake's Christian orthodoxy, convinces only as far as Blake's definitions of Jesus, of the "Human Form Divine", etc., can conform to transparent and consistent definitions, although this is in some part accounted for: "That mingling of attitudes, finally explains the paradox of Blake the anti-Christian Christian, the religious reformer who has been mistaken for an atheist by so many careful readers".<sup>115</sup> What his nineteenth-century critics *believed* he believed on the other hand, is a different story. Blake is a blasphemer in the eyes of his nineteenth-century critics. Their consequent interpretation of Blake's works depended on whether they thought this was a good or bad thing. Swinburne, for example, links Blake's blasphemy to the defamation and repression of the Paris Commune: "Those minute and multitudinous creatures who revile and defame the great – and thereby, says Blake, "blaspheme God, for there is no other God" – have no more power to disturb the man defamed than the judges who try the Revolution at their bar and give sentence against it have the power to undo its work [...]. It is to judge the crimes of the sunrise that these judges sit in

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114 The Muggletonian connection was made by E.P. Thompson in *Witness Against the Beast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Thompson claimed a link between Blake's mother, Catherine Harmitage and George Hermitage, a Muggletonian hymnster, p.104. However, Keri Davies has convincingly refuted E.P. Thompson's suggestion, mainly through a thorough debunking of the "Harmitage", "Hermitage", "Armitage" genealogy of Blake's mother, "William Blake's Mother: a new identification" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* .33:2 (Fall 1999), pp.36 – 50.

115 *The Romantic Reformation*, p.78. See also J.G. Davis, *The Theology of William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p.160.

session”.<sup>116</sup> In 1806, Malkin had lined rationalist belief up against vision. By the 1830s Blake’s critics would be drawing more schizophrenic lines of arbitration: madness and vision would lie on the wrong side of reason and religious hegemony. Underpinning this taxonomy of lunacy was a wide reaching, far more complex kaleidoscope of belief and blasphemy. The schizophrenic school of Blake criticism is one ray of that kaleidoscope of belief. If we look closely at major biographical studies of Blake in the 1830s and 1840s, Blake’s madness, more often than not, goes hand in hand with lingering doubts over his *doubt*, rather than his sanity. Blake himself would have had little patience with this ambivalence: “Doubt Self Jealous Watry folly”(E268). Frederick Tatham works hard to portray Blake as an orthodox believer who only strays into blasphemous ways when doubt is compounded into madness, and madness into doubt:

He [Blake] detested priestcraft & religious cant. He wrote much upon controversial subjects; & like all controversies these writings are inspired by doubt & made up of vain conceits & whimsical Extravagancies. [...]. He was in all essential points orthodox, but he put forth ramifications of doubt, that by his vigorous & creative mind, were watered into the empty enormities of Extravagant & rebellious thoughts[.]<sup>117</sup>

As G.E. Bentley notes, “[i]t is difficult to know what Tatham, who later became an Irvingite and burnt Blake’s works in an excess of piety, may have meant by orthodoxy” (*BR*, p.530, n.). What we *can* tell is that Tatham is using “orthodoxy” as a defining label, in which he can contain the wild extravagancies of Blake’s “doubt”. In early

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116 Algernon Charles Swinburne, “Victor Hugo: l’année terrible” in *Essays and Studies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1888), pp.17 – 59 (p.39).

117 Frederick Tatham, “Life of Blake” in *The Letters of William Blake, Together with a Life by Frederick Tatham* ed. Archibald G. B. Russell (London: Meuthen & Co., 1906). This was the first publication of Tatham’s “Life”, although it was originally written in 1832. The text is quoted from *BR*, pp.507 – 535, (p.530).

posthumous Blake criticism, the notion of blasphemy emerges as, in the words of David Nash, “[...] a place where narratives contract” (Nash, *Blasphemy*, p.52). Rather than broach the difficult, fraught layers of doubt and belief which were to haunt Victorian society, it became politic to paint Blake’s personality in Jekyll and Hyde monotone: the inspired artisan who produced *The Book of Job* versus the unholy fanatic of the later prophetic books. Even though Allan Cunningham seems capable of entering into the complexity of Blake’s designs, describing them as “religious, political and spiritual”, seeing them as linking contemporary concerns to antediluvian myth (*BR*, p.492), when it came to the crunch, Blake’s most influential biographer before Alexander Gilchrist nailed Blake’s memory to madness.<sup>118</sup> In Cunningham, the potential dynamism of Blake’s contemporary concerns became silted up by the minutia of domestic detail. Madness is dissolved by the absolution of a pious death. Cunningham dissipating the political controversy of Blake in a sepia-tinged martyrdom. The scene reads like a death bed recantation.<sup>119</sup>

Following Allan Cunningham’s poetic licence in “inventing” Blake’s death-bed speech, his death became the subject of several sentimental studies. These included Felicia Hemans’s domestic rendering of the deathbed scene, focusing on the presence of Catherine, her “[...] extraordinary character and the painfulness of her situation”.<sup>120</sup> Hemans poetic interpretation set a precedent for the textual domesticity of Blake in the

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118 “A work – whether from poet or painter – conceived in the fiery extasy of imagination lives through every limb; while one elaborated out by skill and taste only will look, in comparison, like a withered and sapless tree beside one green and flourishing. Blake’s misfortune was that of possessing this precious gift in excess. His fancy overmastered him – until he at length confounded ‘the mind’s eye’ with the corporeal organ, and dreamed himself out of sympathies with the actual world” (*BR*, p.503).

119 “He had now reached his seventy-first year and the strength of nature was fast yielding. Yet he was to the last cheerful and contented. ‘I glory,’ he said, ‘in dying, and have no grief but in leaving you, Catherine; we have lived long; we have been ever together, but we shall be divided soon. Why should I fear death? Nor do I fear it, I have endeavoured to live as Christ commands, and have sought to worship God truly – in my own house, when I was not seen of men’”.

120 Paula R. Feldman, “Felicia Hemans and the Mythologizing of Blake’s Death” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 27:3 (1993 – 94), pp.69-72, (p.69). This essay reproduces the poem by Felicia Hemans, “The Painter’s Last Work. – A Scene”, in full, as it was originally published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in June 1832.

1840s and 1850s: ranging from Pamela Chandler's interpretation of "A Cradle Song" presented as a saccharine moment within childhood, in which a little girl sings to her baby sister a poem she has learnt in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, to Mary Howitt's inclusion of Blake's "Ecchoing [*sic*] Green" in the *Pictorial Calender of the Seasons* (under the new title "A Summer Evening on a Village Green", where "[...] text, illustrations and context all emphasize the theme to which the Howitts devoted so much of their lives, the celebration of a vanishing (or vanished) rural England".<sup>121</sup>

It would seem that Dante Gabriel Rossetti also succumbed to the aesthetic comfort of Blake's pious death and domestic bower of bliss. Responding to Frederic Shields's drawings of Blake's last residence, 3 Fountain Court, Rossetti wrote a sonnet, which after several revisions worked its way into Rossetti's *Ballads and Sonnets* of 1881.<sup>122</sup> Robert Essick is quite clear on the "flimsiness" of Rossetti's effort, finding in Rossetti's death-room sonnet "[...] an equal measure of the antithetical, the twice or thrice removed, the pathetic and the evanescent", and concluding that "Rossetti joins with Shields and Gilchrist to celebrate Blake's death as a passing into the heaven of Victorian sensibility".<sup>123</sup> But Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, in their editing and reproduction of Blake's works, were engaged in a far more serious activity than the simple prettification of Blake. The clues are there in Rossetti's sonnet if we care to look for them, particularly the sestet and the variations between the draft Rossetti sent to Frederic Shields and the version included in *Ballads and Sonnets*. What Rossetti creates in the sestet is not simply a pious vignette but a restructuring of the mundane into the sacred. The cupboard becomes a vestment of the soul, the "Holy of Holies", figured in

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121 H.B. de Groot, "R.H. Horne, Mary Howitt and a mid-Victorian Version of 'The Ecchoing [*sic*] Green'" in *Blake Studies* 4:1 (1971), 81 – 8, ( p.82).

122 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets* (London: Ellis & White, 1881), p.314.

123 Robert N. Essick, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Frederic Shields, and the Spirit of William Blake" in *Victorian Poetry* 24 (1986), 163- 172, (p.172). All quotations from the two poems can be found in this essay, which reproduces both in full.

terms of poetic inscription, “Of his soul writ and limned”. Catherine’s bread cupboard – “[...] this other one,/ His true wife’s charge, full oft to their abode/ Yielded for daily bread the martyr’s stone” – already bears the signs of artistic sacrifice and aesthetic martyrdom, recalling the empty plate that Catherine lay before Blake in Gilchrist’s *Life*.<sup>124</sup> But Rossetti’s sonnet then steps into a higher plane of sophistication, transferring Christ’s new testament teachings from Palestine to 3, Fountain Court. The direct echo of Matthew 4.4, “Man shall not live by Bread alone, but on every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God”, can be heard in the closing lines of the draft sonnet, “Ere yet their food might be that Bread alone, / The Words now home-heard from the mouth of God”. The domestic space of Blake’s final days becomes the centre of *logos*, of the Word. The Word of God floats in the everyday air and breath of the artist’s room as easily as Frederic Shields’s floating spirits. But in the version published in the 1881 *Ballads and Sonnets*, Rossetti makes a change in the last line that turns the humanity of the Word, of the Bible, into the humanist Word. “Home-heard” becomes “home-speech”. There is a certain audacity here. Instead of the scene being filled with the eminence of spiritual words, the poet and his wife listening to *hear* the Word of God, they themselves emanate those words, they *speak* the Words themselves. There is something here that touches blasphemy, appropriating the words of the bible and redeeming the domesticity of the death bed scene with an intense power of humanist language and self-determination. Craft, authenticity and spirituality are the subject matter, rather than cupboards, angels or sensibility.

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124 “Her [Catherine’s] method at hinting at the odious subject became, in consequence, a very quiet and expressive one. She would set before him at dinner just what there was in the house, without any comment until, finally, the empty platter had to make its appearance: which hard fact effectually reminded him it was time to go to his engraving for a while. At that, when fully embarked again, he was not unhappy; work being his natural element” (*Life*, p.312).



The Pre-Raphaelites were, in many respects polite blasphemers. Pre-Raphaelitism and the Blake revival were caught on the cusp of a revolution in both technological reproduction and secular aesthetics. In John Ruskin's comments on Pre-Raphaelitism in his *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* both the religious and the reproductive are turning points in the aesthetic revolution of the mid-nineteenth century. Ruskin firstly states that "[t]his, then, is the great and broad fact which distinguishes modern art from old art; that all ancient art was *religious*, and all modern art is *profane*".<sup>125</sup> and goes on to refute the association of Pre-Raphaelitism with photography, arguing of the Pre-Raphaelites that "[...] the last forgery invented respecting them is, that they copy photographs" (Sambrook, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, p.99). Two criticisms were levelled at Pre-Raphaelitism. Firstly, the Pre-Raphaelites were accused of being mere copyists, as evidenced from Ruskin's comments, and secondly they were seen as artistic, and to a certain extent, religious, heretics.<sup>126</sup> The Pre-Raphaelites did not attempt to counter claims of blasphemy in art or religion, in some senses they went out of their way to

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125 John Ruskin. "PreRaphaelitism" [*sic*] extracts from *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, delivered at Edinburgh in November 1853 (London: Smith Elder, 1854) in *Pre-Raphaelitism: a collection of critical essays*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), pp.92 – 104 (p.93).

126 In his essay, *Pre-Raphaelitism* (New York: John Wilet, 1851), pp.14 – 15, John Ruskin makes the link between the profane falling away of religion in modern culture and the new technologies of printing: "[...] the man is created an observer and an imitator; and his function is to convey knowledge to his fellow-men, of such things as cannot be taught otherwise than ocularly. For a long time this function remained a religious one: it was to impress upon the popular mind the reality of the objects of faith, and the truth of the histories of Scripture, by giving visible form to both. That function has now passed away, and none has yet taken its place. The painter has no profession, no purpose. He is an idler on the earth chasing the shadows of his own fancies. But he was never meant to be this. The sudden and universal Naturalism, or inclination to copy ordinary natural objects, which manifested itself among the painters of Europe, at the moment when the invention of printing superseded their legendary labours, was no false instinct". Evelyn Waugh in "PRB: an essay on the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood 1846 – 54 (Kent: Dalrymple Press, 1982), p.13, which was originally privately printed by Alastair Graham in 1926, places the Pre-Raphaelite movement squarely in the context of contemporary theological crisis: "It is, in intention, the Pre-Raphaelite contribution to the theological difficulties of their day and its brief but vigorous preamble states their lack of faith in personal immortality except in so far as the influence of certain great men lives after their death in their followers". William Michael Rosetti in "Pre-Raphaelitism" in *Spectator* 24 (4 October 1851), pp.955 – 57, reproduced in Sambrook, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp.64 – 70 (pp.67 – 68), delineates the difference between the profane routine of the copyist and the spiritual labour of the artist: "His work must be individual too – expressive of *me* no less than of *not me*. He cannot learn off his ideal, and come prepared to be superior to the mere real. It is indeed a singular abuse to call that idealism which is routine and copy, a solecism which cries aloud to common sense for extinction. A young artist cannot enter the lists armed with an ideal prepense, though he may flaunt as his pennant the tracing-paper scored with fac-similes of another man's ideal. If he *will* have one, properly so called, he must work for it; and his own will not be born save through a long and laborious process of comparison, sifting, and meditation".

foster rumours of heresy. The public reaction to John Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents* as "pictorial blasphemy"<sup>127</sup> would seem to be met with confirmation rather than rebuff. Millais declaring to William Holman Hunt that his scruples were "[...] nothing less than irreverent, heretical and revolutionary".<sup>128</sup> The Pre-Raphaelites and their aesthetic ancestors in the Aesthetic movement, most notably Swinburne, were rewriting the aesthetico-moral code. Mysticism became detached from ritual morality and imbued with aesthetic significance, mirroring the Secularists' interest in "mystical Blake" as a cultural iconoclast. In 1893, Max Nordau saw the Pre-Raphaelite appropriation of mysticism as a degenerative trend in both morality and art.<sup>129</sup> He was particularly scathing of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, taking offense at the trait of disconnection that he saw scattered throughout Rossetti's work.<sup>130</sup> What Nordau was grappling with is the infiltration of the mystical doctrine of correspondence into an aesthetic paradigm. Pre-Raphaelite authenticity and authority was not to be found in a materialist reproductive economy or a moralist aesthetic economy. They clung to the ideal of spirit. Art was politically and culturally active in and of itself, a core correspondence enclosing and enrapturing the universe. In truth, the Pre-Raphaelites were not religious or aesthetic, but epistemological and technological heretics. As the age of mechanically produced art and literature began to bite, the Pre-Raphaelites

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127 See Audrey Williamson, *Artists and Writers in Revolt: The Pre-Raphaelites* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1976), p.22.

128 William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1905), extract in Sambrook, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp.27 – 44 (p.27).

129 Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993 [first published 1893], p.69: "All the genuine mystic's presentations, on the contrary, even those of daily experience, are permeated and over-grown with that which is incomprehensible, because it is without form. His want of attention makes him incapable of apprehending the real connecting links between the simplest and most obviously related phenomena, and leads him to deduce then from one or another of the hazy, intangible presentations wavering and wandering in his consciousness. There is no human phenomenon in the art and poetry of the century with whom this characteristic of the mystic so completely agrees as with the originators and supporters of the Pre-Raphaelite movement in England".

130 "Rossetti's refrains, however, are different from this, which is natural and intelligible. They have nothing to do with the emotion expressed by the poem. They are alien to the circle of ideas belonging to the poem. [...]. Many of Rossetti's poems consist of the stringing together of wholly disconnected words, and to mystic readers these absurdities seem naturally to have the deepest meanings" (Nordau, *Degeneration*, pp. 92 – 3).

sought not to copy but to imprint individualism and poetic spirit into every blade of painted grass, every shard of wood.<sup>131</sup> At the same time the new found liberalism, in which the individual was no longer a slave to theological dogma or dogmatic technologies forced new liaisons. A holistic expression of spirit was sought. Visions of the future combined with longing for the past.

Blake would seem to fulfill both these desires, through work that was whole and individual at the same time, namely the illuminated books. In comparing Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Blake, Jerome McGann does not fix upon poetry or frescos or engravings, but the book: “Books are dominantly textual works, often (even) dominantly linguistic, but, as we know from the history of inscribed materials, they bear within themselves iconographic powers that can be released and developed. Certain artists – Blake, Klee, Kandinsky; in our own day Johanna Drucker – work on one side or the other side of the text/picture divide to exploit the expressive potential of the two media. Rossetti is emphatically an artist of that sort”.<sup>132</sup> In his book design, Rossetti strove for a completeness of vision and verse that married the technicality of craft to the religion of aesthetics.<sup>133</sup> In doing so, he created artefacts that spoke of the self-induced blasphemies of the age, of the shift from the sacred to the secular, and the anxieties of those, who unlike the Secularists and freethinkers, could not or would not become out and out non-believers. The book was conceived as more than a bibliographical artefact.

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131 “Art – except such as consists in the mere collection of materials through the medium of strict copyism – represents individual mind and views working from absolute data of fact. Turn and twist it as we may, nature and the man are the two halves of every true work of art” (William Michael Rossetti, “Pre-Raphaelitism” in Sambrook, *Pre-Raphaelitism* p.64). David Mason states in “Pre-Raphaelitism in Art and Literature”, first published in *The British Quarterly Review* 16 (1852), pp.197 – 220, reproduced in Sambrook, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, pp.71 – 91, that art should “[...] go to Nature in all cases, and employ, as exactly as possible, her literal forms” ( p.74).

132 Jerome J. McGann, “Rossetti’s Iconic Page” in *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print and Digital Culture*, eds George Bornstein and Theresa Tinkle (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp.123 – 140, (pp.125 – 126).

133 Paul Goldman in *Victorian Illustration: the Pre-Raphaelites, the Idyllic school and the high Victorians* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), p.3, describes the wholeness of Rossetti’s books as a significant aspect of his work: “These books are important not merely because of the presence of sensual

it possessed an ontological dimension, and was a spiritual oasis in a desert of secular and technological progression. Thomas Carlyle's conception of the book's thaumaturgical properties places the spiritual core of the book not only in the narrative of words, but in the "visible and tangible" presence of the book.<sup>134</sup> This would seem to touch on an aesthetic nerve of Victorian, specifically Pre-Raphaelite culture, stimulated by Blake's unique creations. Swinburne extols Blake's works in mythic terms as "[...] that Titanic brotherhood of books" (*AS*, p.200), while at the same time evoking their physical presence: "For these books, above all, it is impossible to read continuously and not imbibe a certain half-nervous enjoyment from their long cadences and tempestuous undulations of melody. Such passion went to the writing of them that some savour of that strong emotion infects us also in reading pages which still seem hot from the violent touch of the poet" (*AS*, p.257). The sensuous engagement of Swinburne with the pages of Blake's books is a 'circuit of communication',<sup>135</sup> tingling with nervous spirituality. Swinburne short-circuits the political energy of the periodical Blake by returning to Blake's page so intimately, resting his hand on the heart of the work so to speak. The contradiction in Swinburne between the personal "pull" of the book, and his commitment to the unorthodox pulse of Blake's politics finds no easy resolution in *William Blake*, and we shall return to this point later. For now, Swinburne's comments on the passion of Blake's books, and, ultimately, his return to them as self-sufficient ciphers of spirit, serve as an indictment of the subtle reigning in of Blake's periodical presence. The book, in its bibliographically anointed form – bound and sealed – takes precedence over the tatty broadsheets of the journalist's Blake

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drawings which complement the poetry so aptly, but on account of a wholeness of book design rare in that period".

134 Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* [first published 1831] in *Sartor Resartus/Lectures on Heroes/Chartism/ Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896), p.105. Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Sar. etc.* , followed by page numbers.

135 Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books" in *The Kiss of Lamoureeete: reflections in cultural history* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), p.107 – 33 (p.112).



# CULTURAL CONTEXTS

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Mystical Correspondence and Secular Symbolism*

Benedict Anderson and Kevin Gilmartin have opposed views concerning newspapers. Anderson sees them as connecting and Gilmartin sees them as disconnecting. For Anderson, the newspaper re-enforces an imagined globalized community, through the secular communion of ritual reading.<sup>136</sup> For Gilmartin, the nineteenth-century newspaper is the “first culturally influential *anti-organicist* mode of modern discursive construction”, an inconsequential form for inattentive readers; against which the radical press strove to re-affirm the connectivity of human life (Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p.89).

One of the nineteenth-century’s most articulate cultural commentators on the book is Thomas Carlyle. He does not separate the newspaper from the book, nor does he see the newspaper as an assault on the unity of thought or society. At the same time, he does not describe newspapers as a force of secular universalization. Instead newspapers and books occupy a spectrum of spirituality:

On all sides are we not driven to the conclusion that, of the things which man can do or make here below, by far the most momentous, wonderful and worthy are the things we call Books! Those poor bits of rag-paper with black ink on them: - from the Daily Newspaper to the sacred Hebrew Book, what have they not done, what are they not doing! – For indeed, whatever be the outward form of the thing (bits of paper, as we say, and black ink), is it not verily, at bottom, the highest act of man’s faculty that produces a Book? It is the *Thought* of man;

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<sup>136</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), p.35.

the true thaumaturgic virtue: by which man works all things whatsoever.

(“Lectures on Heroes”, *Sar. etc.*, p. 308)

However, nineteenth-century books and periodicals express knowledge and thought in different ways. The representation of knowledge in print media is a continuum between the “wonder” of the aestheticized book - its separateness from the secular jostle of everyday life, its physical elaborateness – and periodicals imbedded in the time and place of common culture. The book and the periodical are cultural expressions of nineteenth-century epistemological representation, traversing the secular and the sacred, the mystical and the pedestrian. They both aim to be correspondent forms: but the book holds that connectivity within itself, while the periodical, particularly the radical periodical, seeks to correspond outside of itself.

The interpretation and reproduction of Blake in the nineteenth century utilises, fuses and transforms both bookish enclosure and periodical openness. Such reproduction marks out the aesthetic transition from mystical correspondence to secular symbolism. The gradual forgetting of correspondence in the nineteenth century is the direct result of changes - delineated most notably by Michel Foucault - in the way knowledge is configured. I use the word forgetting advisedly. The mystical and theological roots of correspondence were not cut away in the glory of nineteenth-century positivism. A conflation of epistemological internalisation and secularisation changed correspondence from a theological doctrine of knowledge to a mystical anachronism. However, mysticism was to persist in the nineteenth century as the lost memory of another sort of knowledge.

Foucault demonstrated in *The Order of Things* that by the late eighteenth century (the period in which Blake originally produced his works) correspondence is an atavistic



idea. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are transitional periods in the representation of knowledge.<sup>137</sup> The ancient predication of knowledge by resemblance had become, by the sixteenth century, a complex system of corresponding symbols that continuously echoed and reflected one another (*OT*, p.17). Foucault sees a new ordering of knowledge emerge in the seventeenth century in which it is knowledge itself that presupposes representation (*OT*, p.59). A taxonomic table allows signs to have knowable meaning, existing between *mathesis* as a calculus of the known order and *genesis* as an analysis of potential order (*OT*, pp.72 – 3). In turn, taxonomic representation gives way in the nineteenth century to an organic model of knowledge (*OT*, pp. 217 – 49). In a striking fashion, the analogous structures of correspondence return. But there is one crucial difference. The analogy is internalised and historicised.<sup>138</sup> Foucault's organic structure is not an uniting paradigm, but a deceptive social discourse that produces the idea of individuality. The individual is self-contained but contains no interior. At the same time the fabric of society is undone, nothing holding together the false significance of these new found individuals. However, Blake's reception history holds fast to ideas of connectivity, of social and synchronic relevance.

The analogous order of knowledge is no longer an open plan dictionary of cosmological strata. Knowledge has a family tree, an inherent and self-coherent meaning. The representation of knowledge becomes specific to certain systems existing in time as well

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137 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the human sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1970), pp.46 - 77. Hereafter this work will be referred to in the text as *OT*.

138 "So that we see emerging, as the organising principles of this space of empiricities, *Analogy* and *Succession*: the link between one organic structure and another can no longer, in fact, be the identity of one or several elements, but must be the identity of the relation between elements (a relation in which visibility no longer plays a role) and of the functions they perform; moreover, if these organic structures happen to be adjacent to one another, on account of a particularly high density of analogies, it is not because they occupy proximate places within an area of classification; it is because they have both been

as space. The way in which knowledge discloses itself becomes genealogical. Meaning is generated rather than manifest *per se*. Hazard Adams sees the distinction between configurations that *embody* meaning and those that *generate* meaning as the distinction between mystical and secular symbols.<sup>139</sup> These secular, self-sufficient signs depart from the uncoupled essences of Foucault's "things", spinning in the esoteric orbit of their own empty significance.<sup>140</sup> Adams' constitution of the secular symbolic construed via Blake's conception of the "prolific" (*Lit. Sym.*, p.19), diverges from Foucault's flotsam of "things".<sup>141</sup> In Foucault's *The Order of Things* nineteenth-century diachrony supersedes eighteenth-century synchrony. For Adams, the Blakean symbolic loses neither historical direction nor immediate significance. Rather, Blake retains the imaginative configuration of history as immanent and immediate, constantly recoverable in the present (*Lit. Sym.*, p.108). Mystical correspondence in Blake's secular symbolic is retained as communicative energy, enabling the political and social relations of the symbolic to be regenerated by later mystic, secular and aesthetic readers of his work. The different perspectives that see symbols as either opaque or as translucent - as cryptic, esoteric ciphers of inner being or as communal, transcendental archetypes - these are perspectives which have historical roots in the struggle and embrace of

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formed at the same time, and the one immediately after the other in the emergence of the successions" (*OT*, p.218).

139 Hazard Adams, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983), p.19: "In the 'secular' symbol, however, the universal becomes not something previously there to be contained but something *generated by* the particular as the seed generates the plant or the poem such interpretations as we make of it [...]". Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Lit. Sym.*, followed by page number(s).

140 "Withdrawn into their own essence, taking up their place at last within the organic structure that maintains them, within the genesis that has never ceased to produce them, things, in their fundamental truth, have now escaped from the space of the table; instead of being no more than the constancy that distributes their representations always in accordance with the same forms, they turn in upon themselves, posit their own volumes, and define for themselves an *internal* space which, to our representation, is on the *exterior*" (*OT*, p.239).

141 "It is from the starting-point of the architecture they conceal, of the cohesion that maintains its sovereign and secret sway over each one of their parts, it is from the depths of the force that brought them into being and that remains in them, as though motionless yet still quivering, that things - in fragments, outlines, pieces, shards - offer themselves, though very partially, to representation. And from their inaccessible store, representation can draw out, piece by piece, only tenuous elements whose unity, whose point of connection, always remains hidden in that beyond" (*OT*, p.239).

religion and secularism, mysticism and enlightenment. That history begins to move into its secular phase with the aesthetic appropriation of correspondence by Romanticism.

Correspondence as described in Emmanuel Swedenborg's writings is a theological construct that unites the spiritual to the natural world:

The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, not only in general but also in particular. Whatever, therefore, in the natural world derives its existence from the spiritual, is said to be its correspondent. It is to be observed that the natural world exists and subsists from the spiritual world, just as an effect exists from its efficient cause. Whatever is under the sun and receives thence its heat and light is called the natural world, and all the things which thence subsist belong to that world. But heaven is the spiritual world and all heavenly things belong to that world.<sup>142</sup>

Correspondence is the alternating current between macrocosm and microcosm. S. Foster Damon's tracing of the interconnectivity of macrocosm and microcosm in Blake's thought moves from ancient magic to modern science (Damon, *William Blake*, p.152). Damon's analogy of correspondence in the twentieth century, as a biological history inscribed within the human body (bearing in mind that Damon is speaking from the scientific perspective of the 1920s), mirrors the classic Foucauldian epistemological shift: from the table of cosmological conjunction to the interior of humanist science. Philosophical pioneering in the Romantic era was already writing correspondence into the realm of humanist reason.

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142 Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: from things seen and heard*, ed., J. Howard Spalding, based on a translation by F. Bayley for the Swedenborg Society (London: J.M. Dent, 1909), pp.38 - 39. Hereafter this text will be referred to as *HH*.

Swedenborg's notions produce a reading, which is parallel, and at the same time, counter to, the advances made by Kant in epistemology.<sup>143</sup> The doctrine of correspondence is a radically symbolic epistemology. Natural phenomena *are* spiritual noumena. As Swedenborg says: "Without knowledge of what correspondence is nothing can be clearly known about the spiritual world; nor about its influence upon the natural world; nor indeed, can the relationship of the spiritual to the natural world be understood at all" (*HH*, p.38). Correspondence creates an epistemology where the spiritual informs all material knowledge. The idea of *a priori* knowledge is vastly complicated by the theological doctrine of correspondence. There can be no idea that exists prior to an all-encapsulating spiritual momentum. This is where the figure of the symbol becomes all-important. The symbol holds *a priori* and *a posteriori* representation together. Susanne Langer sees the symbol as inextricably linked to conception: "Symbols are not proxy for their objects, but are *vehicles for the conception of objects*".<sup>144</sup> The synthesis of German transcendentalism within British associative empiricism<sup>145</sup> transforms correspondence into a dynamic symbolism. This symbolism unites external perception and internal conception. This is the alpha and omega of symbolism for Coleridge. It is worth quoting at length at this point, because these formulations by Coleridge form the basis of subsequent debates and appropriations:

In looking at the objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I

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143 Emmanuel Kant from *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), p.22 (B xvi) .

144 Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: a study in the symbolism of reason, rite and art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp.60 - 61.

145 James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: enlightenment to romanticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.119.

have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim  
Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature/ It is still  
interesting as a Word, a Symbol.<sup>146</sup>

Coleridge's epistemology relies heavily upon a theory of correspondence. The author becomes a reader of the symbolic world, an interpreter of divine correspondence:

If you have accompanied me thus far, thoughtful reader, let it not weary you if I digress for a few moments to another book, likewise a revelation of God - the great book of his servant Nature. That in its obvious sense and literal interpretation it declares the being and attributes of the Almighty Father, none but the fool in heart has ever dared gainsay. But it has been the music of gentle and pious minds in all ages, it is the poetry of all human nature, to read it likewise in a figurative sense, and to find therein correspondences and symbols of the spiritual world".<sup>147</sup>

It is no accident that Coleridge draws on a Swedenborgian idiom in relation to the poet and to symbolism. The signature of mystical correspondence is everywhere in Coleridge's famous definition of the symbol:

On the other hand, a symbol [...] is characterised by a translucence of the special in the individual or of the general in the special or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal.

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146 "Notebook entry, Saturday night, 14 April 1805" in *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 6 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), II, p.2546.

147 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from "Appendix B" of "The Statesman's Manual" in *I. On the Constitution of the Church and State According to the Idea of Each, II. Lay Sermons: i. The Statesman's Manual, ii.*

It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of that unity of which it is the representative.<sup>148</sup>

Kathleen Raine has argued that “[h]is [Coleridge’s] symbol in no way differs from a Swedenborgian ‘correspondence,’ translated into literary terms”.<sup>149</sup> The translation of theological correspondence into literary symbolism marks an iconoclastic alteration of a religious paradigm into a secular one. And it is here that Coleridge is - in a manner of speaking - hoist by his own petard. He can not anticipate what he would consider a descent in the nature of the symbol. The signature that he sees in natural symbols is the hand of God. Coleridge recreates the theological order of natural correspondence in the symbolism of his poetry. The symbol is devolved in his poetic technique. In “Frost at Midnight” we can see the Romantic project in the light of correspondence, whereby the world becomes romanticised by alternating elevation and debasement:

Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame

Lies on my low-burnt fire, and

quivers not:

Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,

Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.

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*"Blessed Are Ye That Sow Beside All Waters"*, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1839), p.267.

148 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Statesman's Manual, Or, The Bible, The Best Guide to political Skill and Foresight: a lay sermon addressed to the higher classes of society, with an appendix, containing comments and essays connected with the study of inspired writings" in *I. On the Constitution of Church and State, II. Lay Sermons*, p.230.

149 "The Swedenborgian Songs" in *Blake and Swedenborg, Opposition Is True Friendship: the sources of William Blake's arts in the writing of Emanuel Swedenborg* eds Harvey F. Bellini and Darrell Ruhl (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1985), pp.69 - 85 (p.84 n.4).

Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature  
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,  
Making it a companionable form,  
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit  
By its own moods interprets, everywhere  
Echo or mirror seeking of itself.  
And makes a toy of Thought.<sup>150</sup>

The simple motion of a film of dust, the simple motion of life, becomes a "gateway" into the general momentum of the spiritual that unites life and also engenders the creative process of the poet's mind. In short, the humble has become symbolic and yet not isolated from that general momentum. The need for constructed forms of meaning, which do not act in separation from the observer, are echoed in the exclamation:

The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in himself.  
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould  
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.  
(*Works*, Shedd, VII, p.177)

Despite the image of all language, all symbols, forming a great chorus of theological praise, Romantic correspondence contains the seeds of epistemological and ontological dissent. At the heart of the Romantic appropriation of correspondence lies the same

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<sup>150</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with an introductory essay upon his philosophical and theological opinions*, ed. Prof. W.G.T. Shedd, 7 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1884), VII, p.176.

dilemma of authority and creativity that haunts Kant's Copernican revolution in epistemology.<sup>151</sup> Creation is not a God given gift but an inflection in the mind of a human agent. For Coleridge, imagination is the correspondent form that exists between the human author and the divine creator. Imagination is the symbol of the authorial self, and dissolves finite perception in infinite *being*.<sup>152</sup>

Swedenborgian correspondence has shifted its metaphysical ground from the theological to the literary. Coleridge aligns the author with a spiritual continuum rather than a theological hierarchy. In the theological writings of Swedenborg there is a close identification of humanity and God. The spiritual form of humanity in Swedenborg becomes the Human Form Divine in the works of William Blake.<sup>153</sup> Yet this correspondence of the divine within humanity does not displace God in the symbolism of Swedenborg or Coleridge. However, for Blake's artisan imagination and for the secular-aesthetic re-drafting of Blake in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, sanctity and authority are no barriers to creativity. The pithy summation that S. Foster Damon gives of the mystical inversions in Blake's *Job* could stand as an epigraph to the whole of Blake's works, as well as to the metaphysical dilemmas of the nineteenth-century critics: "Such is the philosophy of Blake's *Job*; but its story is that of the descent of God and the ascent of Man" (Foster Damon, *William Blake*, p.224).

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151 M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: romantic theory and critical tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p.58.

152 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* 2 vols (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), I, p.295 – 296: "The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead".

153 Kathleen Raine, "The Human Face of God" in *Blake and Swedenborg*, pp.87 - 101.



Leopold Damrosch, in comparing the parallels between Blake's symbolic language and Nicholas Cusanus' mystical language, locates an encapsulating universe of individualism, constellated around ascending/descending order of humanity/divinity.<sup>154</sup> A similar concept of correspondence is explicit in one of the first reproductions of Blake's works after his death, namely Garth Wilkinson's 1839 edition of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Wilkinson writes in the preface of this edition: "He [Blake] here transcended Self and escaped from the isolation which Self involves; and, as it then ever is, his expanding affections embraced universal Man, and, without violating, beautified and hallowed, even his individual peculiarities".<sup>155</sup> In this instance, there is a direct link between Garth Wilkinson's Swedenborgian beliefs, his critical and textual analysis of Blake's works, and Swedenborg's theological doctrine of correspondence. In Wilkinson's "Preface" to the 1839 edition of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* the central idea at the heart of history is the symbolic figure of the Universal Man. The mystical doctrine of correspondence has become a centripetal ideology which pulls the author and history together. Wilkinson sees the work as created by human correspondence with and within history: "On the whole, Wilkinson is a peculiarly mid-nineteenth century Englishman's Swedenborgian, finding his contemporary Swedenborgians in a deeper, more fruitful atmosphere than that of their founder, because the 'modern plane of existence is human and social in ... a new sense' where Swedenborg merely saw 'through' the 'Social World'" (*Nineteenth Century*, p.49, n.31).

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154 For further discussion see Leopold Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.21.

155 James John Garth Wilkinson, "Preface" in William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (London: William Pickering, 1839), pp.xxi – xxii. Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Wilkinson Songs*, followed by page number(s).

In the transmission and reproduction of William Blake's works within Swedenborgian circles in the 1830s and 1840s, an emphasis on correspondence as a literary trope can be detected. A comparison of Wilkinson's and his fellow Swedenborgian, Charles Augustus Tulk's vision of the reproduced *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*<sup>156</sup> illustrates how even at this relatively early date correspondence is changing from a religio-mystic doctrine to a secular-political aesthetic. Although Tulk's edition comes after Wilkinson's, Tulk is placing neither himself nor Blake nor, for that matter, Swedenborg, fully into a public literary arena. It is Wilkinson's appropriation of correspondence in order to explain literary authorship that marks the transfiguring moment whereby a theological doctrine becomes a textual aesthetic in the history of Blake's reception.

This is not Wilkinson's professed intention. Tulk introduced him to the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in 1838. In Wilkinson's biography written by his son we are told that "[t]he delicacy and spiritual simplicity of the 'Songs' made a deep impression on Garth Wilkinson, who was himself to do somewhat similar work in his *Improvisations of the Spirit*". This impression was to prompt "[...]the first *printed*, in the usual sense of the word", edition of the *Songs*. The intention of the preface is described thus: "In his preface, after detailing the then known facts of Blake's life, our young author sets himself to examine the spiritual claims of his poet".<sup>157</sup> It is the critical analysis of the poet's spirituality that differentiates this edition from Tulk's later work. This is not because Tulk is unconcerned with the spiritual or theological nature of Blake's work. But it is, in keeping with his edition of Blake's *Songs*, a private, not a

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156 The respective editions are both based on Tulk's copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* that he lent to Coleridge. But there are crucial differences in the bibliographic presentation of the works, which I will discuss. The two editions are: William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, ed. James John Garth Wilkinson (this includes a preface by Wilkinson), and an edition of twelve copies privately printed by Tulk in 1843.

157 Clement John Wilkinson, *James John Garth Wilkinson: a memoir of his life with a selection of his of his letters*.

public matter. Tulk's 1843 edition is an extremely rare book. The context of its publication was largely unknown before the presentation of a copy in 1945 to the British Museum.<sup>158</sup> This contained the following note by Wilkinson:

This copy of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* was printed by Mr Charles Augustus Tulk, a Friend of Blake's, and a dear friend of my Wife's and mine. - and spaced as in the Original, in order that any who chose, might copy in the paintings with which the original is adorned.

Twelve copies only were printed

April 9, 1886

J.J. Garth Wilkinson

For M. J. Matthews

The details of textual reproduction in this letter represent a correspondence between work and reader that elides the critic and the editor. There is no paratextual commentary. Instead, there is the white blankness of a page awaiting completion by the reader. It is not the reader's own design that will go here but her or his translation of Blake's design. The space for this interaction is opposite the typographic reproduction of the original work. There is something intimate and personal in this labour. Tulk lays bare a space within the text for the reader to inscribe his or her own interpretation of Blake's visual works. Tulk silently invites the reader to partake in the labour that creates the work of art. In this, he seems to partially answer Blake's call in *Jerusalem* to "Let every Christian as much as in him lies engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem" (*Jer* 77,E232). There is a painting in the British Museum's copy of the "Infant Joy", design bound opposite

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<sup>158</sup> For details of the unravelling of this bibliographic mystery see Geoffrey Keynes, "Blake, Tulk, and Garth Wilkinson" in *The Library or Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* Ser.IV 26:3 ( 1945), pp.190 - 2.

Wilkinson's note (*figure 2*). Perhaps this was Tulk's own work, following his copy of the original.

Wilkinson has a different conception of the relationship between the reproduced work of art and the reader. The question is not simply how Blake affects Wilkinson as an individual reader or even an individual Swedenborgian. It is how Blake affects society. In this much, Wilkinson also seems to answer Blake's call to engage "openly and publicly" in "building-up Jerusalem". Tulk did not shy away from public politics, but his relation to Blake is predicated on the individual rather than the communal. He was an MP who campaigned for various humanitarian causes along with Coleridge.

Raymond H. Deck, JR. has suggested that the common interest of these two men in Blake illustrates a shared socio-political sensibility as much as a mystico-aesthetic one: "It is also possible that Tulk's loan of the *Songs* to Coleridge may reflect what Tulk took to be the common *social* as well as Swedenborgian concerns of himself, Coleridge, and Blake. Coleridge and Tulk sought passage of a 'Bill for the Relief of the Children employed in Cotton Factories,' which was before Parliament in early 1818; their mutual interest is apparent in Coleridge's letter to Tulk on February 21st 1818 - only nine days after his commentary on Blake's poems - about Coleridge's ideas for fostering passage of the bill (*Letters*, Griggs, IV, p.843)".<sup>159</sup> However, in Tulk's reproduction of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* there is not the drive towards the conflation of politics, literature and theology that marks Wilkinson's career. Wilkinson rejects outright a closed system of reading communities, in which language is esoteric in its symbolism or hieroglyphic. Instead, there is an emphasis upon communal symbolism.

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<sup>159</sup> Raymond H. Deck, JR., "New Light on C.A. Tulk, Blake's 19th Century Patron" in *Blake and Swedenborg*, pp.107 - 119 (p.109).



*figure 2*

In turn, the early nineteenth-century Swedenborgians. Garth Wilkinson and Charles Augustus Tulk, link Coleridge not only to Blake, but Blake and Coleridge to the mystical tropes of symbolism and correspondence. Tulk introduced Coleridge to the works of William Blake,<sup>160</sup> lending him an original copy of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in 1818.<sup>161</sup> Famously Coleridge commented on this work in letters to the Reverend Henry F. Cary and to Tulk.<sup>162</sup> He saw Blake as a “mystic.” “a man of Genius” and a “Swedenborgian”.<sup>163</sup> But he also spoke of Blake’s “despotism of symbols”.<sup>164</sup> Deborah Dorfmann sees this point of disconnection between Coleridge’s mystically inspired symbolism and the “tyrannical” symbolism of Blake as “Blake’s quarrel (in reverse) with nature and the natural man” (*Nineteenth Century*, p.21). For both Coleridge and Tulk, the correspondence of the divine was absolutely apparent in nature. Tulk interprets Swedenborgian correspondence primarily through nature:

Well, therefore, has it been said, in explaining the origin, and constitution of this world of natural objects and events, which appear to the unenlightened mind so distinct, and indeed so disconnected from ourselves, “that the whole of nature is a theatre which does so represent because the natural world becomes extant, and perpetually exists, that is subsists, through the spiritual world” - and the spiritual

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160 Raymond H. Deck, “New Light on C.A. Tulk”: “Charles Augustus Tulk was a leisured gentleman chiefly known for his interests in Swedenborg and for his political activities. He served as a Member of Parliament (1820-26, 1835-37) and as a county Magistrate for Middlesex (1836-47). His progressive social philosophy is reflected in his newspaper articles arguing for better conditions in factories and in his special interest in prisons and asylums.[...]. Tulk's first appearance with Blake probably came through John Flaxman, Blake's close friend who regularly helped to find patrons for Blake's work. The link between Tulk and Flaxman was Swedenborg” (pp.107 - 108).

161 Geoffrey Keynes, “Blake, Tulk and Garth Wilkinson” in *The Library or Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* Ser.IV, 26, No.3 (December 1945), p.191.

162 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956 - 71), IV pp.832 - 839. Hereafter this collection will be referred to as *Letters*, Griggs, followed by volume and page number(s).

163 To H. F. Cary, 6th February 1818 (*Letters*, Griggs, IV p.834).

164 To C.A. Tulk, 12th February 1818 (*Letters*, Griggs, IV, p.836).

world is not a world of space, but of the state of the will and intellect “from the Divine Essence” [*Arcana Cœlestia*] n.10196, 6948, 8325).<sup>165</sup>

The spiritual elevation of nature could be interpreted as the heritage of Rousseau and nature worship. Dorfmann sees Coleridge’s quarrel with Blake as part of this legacy: “All Blake critics among the post-Romantic Victorians echo Coleridge’s problem in one way or another, insofar as they share the nineteenth century’s legacy from Rousseau, faith in nature and piety toward the natural heart” (*Nineteenth Century*, p.21). This is true to a very limited extent. Both Blake and the post-Romantic Victorian critics exist in a world that is not understood primarily by correspondence with theistic nature. On a social level, the outlook is far more cosmopolitan, and on a metaphysical level, “faith” and “piety” are fragmented by “doubt” and “dissent”. The “high symbolical grotesque” or the “terrible grotesque” was to be the aesthetic hallmark of the 1860s.<sup>166</sup>

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165 Charles Augustus Tulk, *The Science of Correspondency and Other Spiritual Doctrines of Holy Scripture with Illustrative Spiritual Expositors*, ed. Charles Pooley (London: James Spiers, 1889), p.85.

166 R. St John Tyrwhill, “Ancilla Domini, Thoughts On Christian Art, [Part] II: symbolism and the grotesque” in *Contemporary Review* 2 (1866), pp.59 - 79 (p.67): “These names are variously applicable to such works as Giotto’s ‘Last Judgement,’ or Orcagna’s ‘Triumph of Death,’ to Holbein’s ‘Dance of Death,’ to many of Albert Dürer’s greatest works, to Tintoret and Michael Angelo, to William Blake and some work of Turner”.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Secular Mystics and Sacred Aesthetics*

The image of Blake that the 1860s “revival” brings before the world would seem to collude in the aesthetic fantasy of Romantic disillusionment. Biographical and critical commentary concerning William Blake produced in the 1860s seem to both describe Blake as retreating from the modern world and use him as an example of the displaced artist, a man out of time with the mechanisation of art, yet strangely attuned to a spiritual past.

Gilchrist evoked Blake’s style as an enigma comprised of tradition and innovation:

Where beyond the confines of his own most individual mind, did the hosier’s son find his model for that lovely web of rainbow’s fancy already quoted? I know of none in English literature. For the *Song* commencing

My silks and fine array,

with its shy evanescent tints and aroma as of pressed rose-leaves, parallels may be found among the lyrics of the Elizabethan age, alien though it be in its own.  
(*Life*, p.21)

Swinburne at one point equates Blake with Shakespeare (*AS*, p.12). A few lines later he calls Blake an “[...]obscurely original reformer in art” (*AS*, p.13). A comparison with Shelley positions Blake as the poet *in extremis*: “Shelley in his time gave enough of perplexity and offence; but even he, mysterious and rebellious as he seemed to most men, was less made up of mist and fire than Blake” (*AS*, p.3). But a few pages later Blake is described in terms of literary nostalgia: “One can say, indeed, that some of



these earliest songs of Blake's have the scent and sound of Elizabethan times upon them" (*AS*, p.9).

The representation of Blake as both looking to the future and recalling the past - while at the same time mystically transcending any temporal or spatial definition - is a critical adjunct to nineteenth-century Aestheticism:

The "aesthetic" poetry is neither a mere reproduction of Greek or medieval poetry, nor only an idealisation of modern life and sentiment. The atmosphere on which its effect depends belongs to no simple form of poetry, no actual form of life. Greek poetry, medieval, or modern poetry, projects, above the realities of its time, a world in which the forms of things are transfigured. Of that transfigured world this new poetry takes possession, and sublimates beyond it another still fainter and more spectral, which is literally an artificial or "earthly paradise." It is a finer ideal, extracted from what in relation to any actual world is already an ideal. Like some strange second flowering after date, it renews on a more delicate type the poetry of a past age, but must not be confounded with it.<sup>167</sup>

Walter Pater's essay on Aesthetic poetry seems to both stultify and liberate poetry. The stultification comes from the dream-like stupor of idealism, where the "transfigured world" removes poetry from the "realities of its time". Poetry, in this aesthetic paradigm, has no political or social valency or vigour. It deadens the actual. At the same time, poetry is liberated from the specificity of historical place or time.

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167 Walter Pater, "Aesthetic Poetry" in *Bibeiot* 5:10 (1899), pp.303 – 319 (p.303).

However, Aestheticism *is* a historically specific movement, seeking to escape its present material conditions by reverting to an idealised past. The paradox inherent in the “earthly paradise” of Pater’s Aestheticism can be understood within the context of what Raymond Williams has termed “a mood of contrasts” defining cultural change in the nineteenth century.<sup>168</sup> Taking Pugin’s *Contrasts* as the keynote to his famous discussion of culture and society in his book of the same name, Williams draws a map of changing meanings in the nineteenth century. *Industry, democracy, class, art and culture* (CS, p.xiii). are the words that mark out the new society of industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation. Williams extrapolates the meaning of *aesthetics* and *aesthetes*, seeing them as denoting a special kind of artistic judgement and skill, separate from the common skills of human society (CS, pp.xv – xvi). However, the emergence of the aesthetic ideal, of the artist as genius, is a double-edged sword. The assertion of the poetic self, of the aesthete, has roots in the Romantic revolt against the mechanisation of life. What is at stake in the Romantic ideal correlates to what is at stake in both Blake’s most fervent poetry and in the most vigorous appropriation of that poetry by the Victorians. That is, the Romantic imagination seeks to re-construct the social and cultural organisation of society in humanist terms. However, the Romantic poets found themselves in a catch 22 situation. In their desire to transcend the spiritually insensate and imaginatively autistic *status quo* of mechanical production and divided labour, they became stranded between idealism and capitalism.<sup>169</sup> The trade off between an aesthetic economy of idealisation and a political economy of market forces would seem to be a

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168 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780 - 1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p.3. Hereafter this text will be referred to as CS, followed by page number(s).

169 “In practice there were deep insights, and great works of art; but, in the continuous pressure of living, the free play of genius found it increasingly difficult to consort with the free play of the market, and the difficulty was not solved, but cushioned, by idealization” (CS, p.47).

withdrawal from the vital pressures of life. Williams sees the aesthetic dream of Pater as ultimately a failure of Romanticism.<sup>170</sup>

For Williams, Aestheticism is a stilling and stalling of social communion, the ironic endgame of Carlyle's and Ruskin's withdrawal into the organic past: "As the new industrial society established itself, critics like Carlyle and Ruskin could find the 'organic' image only in a backward look: this is the basis of their 'mediaevalism', and that of others" (CS, p.140). In Pater's Aestheticism, Williams sees a too close identification of the artist and art with an organic model that separates the action of the here and now from a nostalgia for a romanticised past. Mental and physical labour - the ideological and material meeting points - can no longer be recognised.

However, there is an alternative model to the demise of praxis in Romanticism and Aestheticism. Mark Schorer suggests that what is metaphysical and orientated towards the inner self in the tradition of mystical experience becomes political in the tradition of religious dissent. Schorer describes what happens historically to mysticism when confronted and conflated with Protestantism: "The mystical impulse in Protestantism tends to destroy itself by perpetually throwing the emphasis on the immanent rather than on the transcendental, and consequently on the aesthetic rather than on the ascetic; and to express in terms of images rather than of ideas, of sensuous observation rather than of conceptual forms".<sup>171</sup> The Protestant mysticism described by Schorer seems to be

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170 "But what was called, from Pater in the late 'sixties, the new doctrine of 'art for art's sake', was really little more than a restatement of an attitude which properly belongs to the first generations of the Romantics. [...]. Pater's kind of sensibility thus reduces a general and active proposition to what is, in effect, its negation. Art for art's sake is a reasonable maxim for the artist, when creating, and for the spectator when work is being communicated; at such times, it is no more than a definition of attention. The negative element is the phantasy - usually explicable - that a man can himself become, can confuse himself with, a made work. The phantasy is common enough for Pater to be comprehended; it is indeed a general distortion of the emphasis on culture, which otherwise Pater clearly continues and conveys" (CS, pp.166 - 168).

171 Mark Schorer, *William Blake: the politics of vision* (New York: Henry Holt, 1946), p.63.

reflected in Blake's later, more explicitly Platonist, sensuous perception of Christ in his *Annotations to Berkeley*: "Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense at once Christ addresses himself to the Man, not to his Reason. Plato did not bring Life & Immortality to Light. Jesus only did this" (E664). But empirical sensation translated into an immanent mysticism does not sit so easily with some later annotations to the same piece of work: "The Natural Body is an Obstruction to the Soul or Spiritual Body" (E664) or "This is my Opinion but Forms must be apprehended by Sense or the Eye of Imagination Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him" (E664) or again "What Jesus came to Remove was the Heathen or Platonic Philosophy which blinds the Eye of Imagination The Real Man" (E664).

There are real tensions and torsions in Blake between opposites: between the sensual and the imaginative, between the immanent and the transcendental. Famously Blake's aesthetics and ethics are based on a dialectical celebration of opposites. Mark Schorer superbly pinpoints the political impulse that turns the world of mysticism and religion upside down, which creates a dialectical force between the metaphysical and the political. In discussing William Law, whom E.P. Thompson describes as "[...]the most articulate and cogent of the English eighteenth-century Behmenists" (*Witness Against the Beast*, p.36). Schorer discusses the deistic tendency of Protestantism, and then extrapolates the historical and political ramifications of this tendency for mysticism: "[...] that force which inverted the metaphysical superstructure of mysticism [...] turned mysticism into something else, something moral and political. The thoroughness of the immanent here drives out the transcendental altogether. Redemption is placed entirely in nature, and regeneration is a problem in reorganization" (Schorer 1946, p.63.) The mystical becomes a model for social reorganisation. Schorer is quite definite in placing Blake at the political end of the mystical spectrum: "Once freed from religious dogma,

the least political of impulses gradually becomes the specific agent of political upheaval. In the history of these occurrences, Blake occupies not the first but the final position" (Schorer 1946, p.61).

The legacy of Romanticism and mysticism reaches a complex manifestation in the emergence of Blake and his works in both Aestheticism and Secularism in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. In M.H. Abrams study of tradition and revolution in Romantic literature, displaced theology finds a new articulation in the ideology and imagination of Romantic creativity: "[...] Romantic philosophy and literature are a displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularised form of devotional experience" (*Natural Supernaturalism*, pp.65 - 66). The Romantic poet struggles to reintegrate the paradigms of religious tradition within the culture of self. The guiding paradigms of religious orthodoxy are assimilated into the imaginative and emotional landscape of the individual. Abrams' position on the evolution of the Romantic tradition has been interpreted as a drama of consciousness, the human imagination redefining epistemological and ontological paradigms.<sup>172</sup> But by the later nineteenth century Abrams sees the drama of consciousness as dissolving into existentialist angst:

The Victorian plaint, "alone, alone, all all alone," is no less prominent in Pater's sensationist solipsism and Arnold's cultural humanism than in Carlyle's economic corporativism. Experience, said Pater in the Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, "is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced," and every impression "is the

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172 Joshua Wilner, "Romanticism and the Internalization of Scripture" in *Midrash and Literature*, eds Sanford Budick and Geoffrey H. Hartman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp.237 - 251 (p.239): "[...] in Romanticism the 'design of Biblical history' becomes reinterpreted as a drama of consciousness, with the human imagination replacing supernatural intervention as the agency of redemption".

impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world." For Matthew Arnold modern life is a "strange disease" with "its sick hurry, its divided aims," and with no place for men to pitch their tents except on the "poor fragments of a broken world" (*Natural Supernaturalism*, p.312).

The secular world is a world in which reality has become a solitary dream. Irving Singer in considering the interaction of aesthetics and scepticism in the development of the "Art for Art's Sake" doctrine sees a metaphysical desire underlying Aestheticism's antipathy.<sup>173</sup> Aestheticism came to birth in the strange twilight dreaming between ancient authority and decadent dissent. Yet, in the Medieval past, the Aesthetes of the nineteenth century found one paradigm of creativity that embodied both authorial tradition and idealised dissent. The title design for Thomas F. Plowman's essay "The Aesthetes" for *The Pall Mall Magazine*, January 1895, follows from left to right the nineteenth-century development of Aestheticism, scanning the period 1830 - 1870, denoting in banners crucial moments and movements in that development. The starting point for the "Aesthetic Adventure" is marked at 1840 and the Gothic revival. In Ruskin's theory of art and architecture, the Gothic meets the Aesthetic, and the seeds are planted that will enable the Romantic Blake to become part of the Pre-Raphaelite legacy.

Ruskin rediscovered Blake while assembling material for the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843).<sup>174</sup> Marcia Allentuck has pleaded that the idea of Ruskin as a Blake

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<sup>173</sup> Irving Singer, "Aesthetics of Art for Art's Sake" in *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 7 (1954), pp.343 – 359 ( p.358): "In the Middle Ages [...] the artist relied on the church authorities for the choice of subject-matter as well as the moral and philosophical attitude that he was to assume toward it. With the growth of individualism and scepticism, and in general the deterioration of religious belief in a sustaining world-order, the artist has been forced to seek, a new kind of faith".

<sup>174</sup> I would like to thank Malcolm Hardman for pointing out this connection between Blake and Ruskin.

“enthusiasm” has to be tempered by other concerns such as changing taste and financial concerns.<sup>175</sup> However, Blake was important in helping to form Ruskin’s notions of the Gothic. For both Blake and Ruskin, the living form is the essence of Gothic aestheticism, in comparison with Greek or Classical aestheticism. Blake states his aesthetic theory: “Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory. Living Form is Eternal Existence. Grecian is Mathematic Form Gothic is Living Form” (*On Virgil*, E270). Ruskin reflects on the beauty of this aesthetic: “Nothing that lives is, or can be, rigidly perfect: part of it is decaying, part nascent ... And in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies which are not only signs of life, but sources of beauty”.<sup>176</sup> Both Blake and Ruskin differentiate a mathematical, abstract, perfected form, from a gothic, grotesque, asymmetric, life form. However, there is one crucial difference between Blake and Ruskin. The Blakean imagination always retains a Platonist inflection. It is “Eternal Existence”. Ruskin’s “Gothic” is rooted in a material world of organic mutability: “[...] imperfection is in some sort essential to all we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change” (Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, p.171). Ruskin applies the imperfection of the grotesque to Blake’s own art: “Blake, perfectly powerful in the etched grotesque of the book of Job, fails always more or less as soon as he adds colour: not merely for want of power (his eye for colour being naturally good), but because his subjects seem, in a sort, insusceptible to completion”.<sup>177</sup> The grotesque of *Job* is its aesthetic power - its beauty lies in its imperfection, in the artisan’s Gothic imagination. In turn, this aesthetic power of imperfection has a social significance. It is the mark of artisan liberty. The Gothic is a form free from the conformity demanded by capitalist labour systems.<sup>178</sup>

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175 Marcia Allentuck, “Blake and Ruskin Again: unpublished sources not in Bentley” in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 75:4 (1981), pp.447 – 8.

176 John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1853), II, p.171.

177 John Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Of Many Things* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1873), III, p.103.

178 For further discussion see Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: the Victorians and aesthetic democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), p.35.

The Gothic for Ruskin is tied to an architectural style that embodies and preserves the sensuous, emotive *poesis* of an artisan tradition: “For, indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy”. Ruskin starts by contrasting historical architecture with the material evolution and mutability of a profane world. But instead of transcending that world through the imagination, he focuses on the interchange between cultural artefacts and the materialisation of history: “[...] it is not until a building has assumed this precious character, [...] till its walls have been witnesses of suffering, and its pillars rise out of the shadows of death, that its existence, more lasting as it is than that of the natural objects of the world around it, can be gifted with even so much as these possess, of language and of life”.<sup>179</sup> Architecture embodies the communion of the artisan with history, and of humanity with the divine. In quoting Blake’s motto to *TheL*,<sup>180</sup> Ruskin talks of a hierarchy of knowledge, dividing divine knowledge from humanity, and human knowledge from animalism: “[...] there is a different kind of knowledge good for every different creature, and [...] the glory of the higher creatures is in ignorance of what is known to the lower” (*Eagle’s Nest*, p.27). Ruskin does not conceive of an imaginative or poetic revolution that will dispel hierarchical knowledge, placing human imagination at the centre. Instead, higher knowledge is achieved through human “edification”: “Note the word; builds forward, or builds up, and builds securely because on modest and measured foundation, wide, though low, and in the natural and living rock” (*Eagle’s Nest*, p.36). Ruskin’s aestheticism can be described from the perspective of this epistemological model. It is

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179 John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (Sunnyside, Kent: George Allen, 1886), pp.186 - 187.

180 “Doth the eagle know what is in the pit,/ Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?”, quoted in *The Eagle’s Nest: ten lectures on the relation of natural science to art* (London: George Allen, 1904), p.27.



an architectonic fusion of the organic and the divine, the human and the eternal. What binds these opposites together is the material reality, manifested in architecture, of history and tradition. In Ruskin's schema, materialism becomes the vital spark in the mystical correspondence between the spiritual world and the organic world. Ruskin might be said to negotiate between secular materialism and divine cognizance. In this sense he sets the stage for Aestheticism. In its blending of materialistic nostalgia and secular mysticism, Aestheticism is a product of alienation and secularisation: "[...] in a sense all of Aestheticism might be said to emerge out of the twilight of a waning religious faith in the later-nineteenth century".<sup>181</sup> Ruskin creates a quasi-divine aesthetic that aims to build its temples on the discarded stones of the industrial Revolution: "[...] Ruskin [...] had attempted to divorce his aesthetico-moral theory from religion".<sup>182</sup>

At the other end of the aesthetico-moral spectrum is Algernon Charles Swinburne. Swinburne's comparison in *William Blake: a critical essay* between Blake's *Everlasting Gospel* and a poem from Victor Hugo's *Châtiments* (or chastisements) (*AS*, p.173n.), bonds present politics to mystical dissent. It is in a similar spirit of recognition that William James Linton and the Secularists bring both Blake and Hugo into the fold of their peculiar "[...] mélange of atheism and social reform".<sup>183</sup> Secularism is a strange admixture of scepticism and hope, of religious doubt and political faith. The varieties of unbelief contained within the Secular movement form a spectrum, running from agnostic mysticism to positivistic atheism. Within this spectrum lies the freedom of the individual to interpret the tenets of belief and disbelief: "But although there is a strand of atheistic republicanism in the English tradition, and apparently in Linton himself, it is

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181 Leon Chai, *Aestheticism: the religion of art in post-romantic literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.ix.

182 Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry: 1830 – 1880*, 8 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), IV, p.367.

183 Jim Herrick, *Vision and Realism: a hundred years of The Freethinker* (London: G.W. Foote & Co., 1982), p.1.

probably true to say that English radicals and republicans were on the whole not atheistic but brought to their politics their own individualistic and unorthodox brand of religious sentiment”.<sup>184</sup> The combination of individualism and displaced religious feeling is an emotional tie between Aestheticism and Secularism. But the relationship between the two movements is not simply based on a shared emotional reaction to religious dissolution or a new emphasis on the individual self. The way in which both movements come to identify Blake as in some way a precursor of their fundamental beliefs provides a clue as to the epistemological and ontological desires of these groups.

The relationship between Blake and nineteenth-century Secularism is a peculiar one. The latter is similar to Aestheticism in that it is founded on a marriage of religious and secular mysticism. The obverse side of Pater’s equation of “a rival religion with a new rival *cultus*” (“Aesthetic Poetry”, pp.305 – 306) is the rise of the Secular movement as a political parallel to Aestheticism’s dream of beauty. In common with Aestheticism, Secularism grew out of the dissolution of religious faith and the emergence of new epistemological paradigms in the nineteenth century. But unlike Aestheticism and Pre-Raphaelitism, Secularism was not inspired by a Gothic past, but motivated by the political future. The Secularists were a politically active and committed group. Thomas Paine was a hero and *The Age of Reason* had the status of a secular bible. George William Foote saw Secularism and political radicalism as going hand in hand: “What a Christian may be, he [the Secularist] must be. Freethinkers are naturally radicals. They are almost to a man on the side of justice, freedom and progress”.<sup>185</sup> The historical manifestation of Aestheticism and Secularism would at this point seem to be polarised

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184 Brian Rigby, “Victor Hugo and the English Secularists and Republicans” in *Victor Hugo et la Grande-Bretagne: actes du deuxième colloque vinaver*, ed. A.R.W. James (Liverpool: Carnes, 1986), pp.75 - 101 (p.79).

185 George William Foote, “The Gospel of Freethought” in *Flowers of Freethought: first series* (London: The Pioneer Press, 1893), pp.106 -107.

between Romantic idealism and scientific positivism. But this is a crass dichotomy. Nineteenth-century freethought involved not only the rejection of religion upon positivistic grounds but speculation upon metaphysical and ontological possibility. What unites Aestheticism and Secularism runs far deeper than what separates them. On the surface, one is an artistic movement with aesthetic aims, the other a social movement with political aims. But both movements contain testimony to the metaphysical desires of individuals in a secular age. The spiritual musings of Pater or Rossetti on the transcendental potential of Aesthetic beauty may come as no surprise. But speculation on the possibility of negative theology in a Secularist press that has also heralded positivism and Comte opens up the vista of secular mysticism: "It is a higher religion, instead of a negation, that we want. I admit the necessity of negation first; but what (if I may use a rather Hegelian phrase) of the 'negation of negation?' The transcendental Religion has the freedom of the negative party, and the hope of the affirmative party".<sup>186</sup> Hegel is often quoted by the Secularists in relation to theological or metaphysical speculation, particularly if mysticism is invoked: "( 'Religion is something internal having to do with conscience alone' ) - Every church is hostile to liberal thought, because real Protestantism carried out to its ultimate, is Freethought - i.e., destructive. It never enters into the priestly mind that there can be a spiritual, affirmative Freethought, and even a Swedenborg is to priests a name most abhorrent".<sup>187</sup> Swedenborg's name signals freethought's indulgence of mysticism as an alternative religion. In Blake, the Secularists found a spiritual tradition that was not based on didactic theology or the upholding of hegemonic institutions or regimes.

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186 "The Shepherd," "Analogy, Poetry and Progress" in *National Reformer* 20 (Jan. 9th 1870), p.21.

187 B.T.W.R., "The Advance of Liberality" in *National Reformer* 17 (February 26th 1871), p.132.

The mystical vision of Blake haunts rational secularism, and is indicative of the dialectical relationship between theological enquiry and practical reason that always formed, and disturbed, the foundations of Secularism. The Unitarian Stoppford Brooke observes that Blake “[...]was then at daggers drawn with all the old theology”,<sup>188</sup> and makes the essential point that the distinction between heretic and infidel, atheist and blasphemer is often dissolved in blanket terminology. In doing so, he pinpoints the axis on which nineteenth-century Aestheticism balanced the demands of the sacred and of the secular: namely poetry and art. His argument has a decidedly political intonation, and is reminiscent of Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry* in which “[t]he most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry”:<sup>189</sup>

Sometimes they did this work by ignoring the doctrines that limited His love: sometimes they did it by fiery indignation with those doctrines because they violated love. When they did it in the first fashion, they kept, but often with difficulty, the name of Christians. When they did it in the second way they were called heretics, or infidels, blasphemers or atheists. But names are nothing: they did their work, and it was the work of universal love. (*The Deveopment of Theology*, pp.19 – 20)

Stoppford Brooke presents the above terms aimed at atheism as the sweeping denigrations of a tyrannical and philistine society. William Michael Rossetti, in contrast, follows Swinburne in differentiating these terms. In this sense, he is far more in tune

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188 Stoppford A. Brooke, *The Development of Theology as Illustrated in English Poetry from 1780 to 1830* (London: Green, 1893), p.22. For Foote's critique of this essay see "The Poets and Liberal Theology" in *Flowers of Freethought, second series* (London: The Pioneer Press, 1894), pp.195 - 203.

189 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" in *Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry; Shelley's Defence of Poetry and Browning's Essay on Shelley*, ed. H.F.B. Brett-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1921), pp.21 - 59 (p.59).

with the process of subtle classification at work in defining, and also confounding.

Blake's theology:

He was (as Mr Swinburne has well pointed out) a heretic, not an infidel. He would zealously and vigorously confute the freethinkers, such as Paine and Godwin, whom he met at the table of the bookseller Mr Johnson; and would constantly in later years uphold revelation and christianity, and argue in a very incensed tone against materialism. But, if his companion were a Christian of any ordinary type, he would regard Blake himself as the freethinker and unbeliever, cut off by impassable lines of demarcation from the communion of the faithful.<sup>190</sup>

Perhaps it is the very shifting of classification both in this period and in how Blake is interpreted in this period, which allows him to re-emerge in the radical community of the Secularists. Romantic poetry was not disseminated as the musings of "ineffectual Angels" in political and social "voids", but was seen as vital anticipations of the modern world. In 1878 Edward Dowden interpreted Romantic literature in the light of the French Revolution. He saw that there was no easy separation of political will and imaginative liberty in Blake's mythology: "In Blake's enormous mythology the genius of Revolution was an honoured divinity. Its historical apparition, however, although Blake hailed that apparition with enthusiasm, was less to him than its eternal essence, its 'spiritual form'".<sup>191</sup> Those Secularists who wrote about Blake do not talk of him in terms of political or material revolution. Instead, the reasoned rhetoric of political and

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190 "A Prefatory Memoir" in *The Poetical Works of William Blake: lyrical and miscellaneous*, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), p.lxxvi.

191 Edward Dowden, *Studies in Literature, 1789 - 1877* (London: Kegan Paul, 1878), p.15.

social debate gives way to a language that is beyond classification. The language of a visionary, almost evangelical, aestheticism consumes the diction of secularism:

William Blake is a figure quite unique, baffling all classification except of the broadest kind. His work is unlike every other man's; he belongs to no school, and has no actual disciples or imitators: his birthright consigned him to companion-less solitude. None ever had intenser fire of genius. He lacked the versatility of completer minds, but the defect is atoned for by his concentration on the loftiest objects of thought, and the deepest, most shrouded, secrets of being. He is a star of the first magnitude in the constellations of poetry and art, shining with quenchless lustre amid the astral glories of their lucid firmament, companioned now in mid-heaven by the sacred band of great ones who have passed through the gloomy portal of death to emerge transfigured and deathless evermore.<sup>192</sup>

God and myth might be absent from the Secularist ontology, but this does not dissolve the thirst for metaphysical knowledge. Georges Bataille's comments, in his essay on Malcolm de Chazal, place Blake at the culminative, still point of humanist metaphysics.<sup>193</sup> As Existentialism may be the end-point of Humanism, Surrealism may be the end-point of Secularism. If the Surrealist appropriation of Blake is not the inheritance of the mid nineteenth-century English criticism, then the French avant-garde

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192 George William Foote, "William Blake" in *National Reformer* 25 (February 14<sup>th</sup>, February 21<sup>st</sup>, February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 21<sup>st</sup> 1875), pp.100 – 1, 115 – 6, 131 – 2, 181 - 2 (p.182).

193 Georges Bataille, "Happiness, Eroticism and Literature" in *The Absence of Myth: writings on surrealism*, ed., and trans., Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994), pp.186 - 208 (p.193): "Chazal talks about God and the angels in the same way as Blake does: he places them in a world in which they are separated from nothing, where they lose themselves, where they appear no longer to be anything other than man demanding his most elevated and limitless vista. 'God', he writes, 'is the only neutral point of ideas, as the 'dead calm' is the pivot of a cyclone. As men we are always to the left or right of an idea. If we were right in the centre of any of our ideas we would lose consciousness of ourselves, and would

at least interpreted Blake in interestingly similar ways to the English avant-garde in the previous century. This is important because the Surrealists and Existentialists, particularly Georges Bataille, start from a position that places Blake as a precursor of Surrealism<sup>194</sup> and at the limits of religious and poetic experience: "Blake managed, in phrases of a peremptory simplicity, to reduce humanity to poetry and poetry to Evil [...] Blake's achievement was to strip the individual figure of both poetry and religion and to return to them that clarity in which religion has the liberty of poetry and poetry the sovereign power of religion".<sup>195</sup>

It is my argument that Georges Bataille's "phrases of peremptory simplicity" hold good for the mid-nineteenth century reception of Blake. Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, and Secularism are not misinterpreters of Blake. They are engaged in exactly the same interaction between poetry and religion that Bataille attributes to Blake's works. It is their closeness to the subject matter that induces these "[c]ritics' moments of greatest blindness with regard to their own critical assumptions" which "are also the moments at which they achieve their greatest insights".<sup>196</sup> Bataille is writing from a position of relative detachment, in comparison with his nineteenth-century peers, when he reflects upon the relation of poetry and religion in Blake's works. There is knowledge and an acceptance of the secular discourses of modernity. The mid-century revival occurs in the tumult of these new ways of seeing the world.

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become reabsorbed in God". The article was originally a review of Malcolm de Chazal's *Sens-plastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948) The quote from Chazal is taken from p.220 of this work.

194 "This is why it seemed legitimate to suggest (as Jean Wahl did) that surrealism did not exist before it was defined, but that is not completely true: Rimbaud or Blake, to whom Wahl refers, like Masson today, did not dissociate poetic vision from the intelligence" (*The Absence of Myth*, p.181).

195 Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1973), p.61 - 66. This work was first published in French in 1957 as *La Littérature et le Mal*.

196 Paul de Mann, *Blindness and Insight: essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism* (London: Meuthen & Co., 1983), p.109.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *The Secular Self*

The sovereignty of nineteenth-century identity became less and less invested in religious configurations, such as the soul, and more and more isolated in the consciousness of the individual. The symbol of the One Man, of the Universal, which unites all, is the symbol that links William Blake to the heritage of theological mysticism and to the modern sovereignty of the secular self. Contiguous with the history of the Romantic symbol is the development of Blake's concept of the One Man, the Universal Self:

We live as One Man, for contracting our infinite senses  
We behold as multitude; or expanding: we behold as one,  
As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man  
We call Jesus the Christ; and he in us, and we in him,  
Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life.  
(*Jer* 34[38]:17 – 20, E180)

Blake never loses the "we" of social communion. Even in the state of contracted sense, the sphere of individual being, perception is out-going, able to become part of a wider societal impulse. David Punter has coined the term "Universal Individual" in relation to Blake's dialectics of subject and object, self and society.<sup>197</sup> This transpersonal identity finds the humanist "soul" in the immediacy of society. The unity of the One Man

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197 "A further consequence of Blake's depiction of these relations is a blurring of the customary distinction between internal world and external world, and since this blurring affects the existence of the individual as such, the emergence of a conception of a wider, universal individuality, which Blake was to call Albion", David Punter, *Blake, Hegel and Dialectic* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982), pp.130 - 131.



resides in “Jesus the Christ” in *Jerusalem*, but Christianity did not have an exclusive purchase on the ideal of the “Universal Family”. All along the watchtower of nineteenth-century radical thought, Blake’s ideal reflects a Utopia of social organisation. Nicholas Williams sees the move from *Milton* to *Jerusalem*, from “[...] an individualistic psychological mode to a social communicative mode for the depiction of utopian change”, as the literary parallel of Robert Owen’s attempt to build a communal utopia at New Lanark between 1800 and 1829.<sup>198</sup>

William James Linton sees the self as a potentially anarchical force, mutating into the tyranny of dictatorship and Nationalism:

The spirit of our earth has made only two steps on the path of life. History has given us but two unfinished chapters: phases of individualism, LIBERTY and EQUALITY. [...]. The Freedom of the world’s first day was anarchy, the anarchical assertion of self: it vindicated only the stronger. When the man would be free, it was for his own sake only; when what was called a nation strove for freedom, it was denied to all others. Freedom was my God, the genius of the individual; or our God, the tutelary deity of a peculiar people: the freest kept slaves.<sup>199</sup>

Linton articulates the danger of the secular individual: anarchy of self, unbalanced by a fractured and fragmented society, becomes a Urizenic force of nationalistic entrenchment and political despotism. However, this does not mean that Linton rejects the sovereignty of the individual in favour of a fatalistic reliance on a puppeteer God.

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<sup>198</sup> *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.171.

<sup>199</sup> W.J. Linton, *The Religion of Organization: an essay read to friends in Boston, Jan. 27 1869* (privately printed as a reprint from the Boston Radical), pp.1 - 2.

Instead he suggests a marriage of Church and State that is based on social organization, rather than blind subservience, the altar of worship being the political good rather than the theological command. Linton's closing remarks to *The Religion of Organization* are shorn of mystical intonation, and the political theory espoused is based on social reality rather than mystical conundrums:

One heart-word spoken by you would rend off the fetters of the kings and enable the freed nations to begin the *universal republic*. With us, with you, the new religion is political organization on a religious basis, a true marriage of Church and State. The first step toward that is a party bound together by the desire to learn what republicanism really is, how to make that the law of the land, and how to help our brothers throughout the world. When you have such a party, the party of the full direct sovereignty of the people, the party of organization of religious duty, of dutifulness at home and abroad, no matter where, you will have founded the first Church of the Future. (*Religion of Organization*, p.38)

Swinburne also calls for the universal Republic, but he replaces political priests with poetic prophets:

The points of contact and sides of likeness between William Blake and Walt Whitman are so many and so grave, as to afford some ground of reason to those who preach the transition of souls or transfusion of spirits. The great American is not a more passionate preacher of sexual or political freedom than the English artist. To each the imperishable form of a possible and universal Republic is equally requisite and adorable as the temporal and spiritual queen of ages as of men. (*AS*, pp.300 – 01)

Swinburne and Linton plead for freedom, for the volition of the self, but also for the communion of spirit. They both see these as pre-requisites of the universal Republic, the final and complete union of humanity, regardless of Nation. Alexander Gilchrist is by no stretch of the imagination a Republican, but his biography does have a communal spirit abroad, focused not on the Universal but on the metropolitan. For Gilchrist, the secular self, seeking solace in society, is not an “Universal Individual” but a “metropolitan Identity”.

Alexander Gilchrist’s biography taps into the ley lines of imagination and self in Blake’s London while at the same time strongly defining the socio-historical reality of the city. In this Gilchrist is following in Blake’s footsteps: “Blake’s continuing city takes its origin from a synthesis of literary antecedents with Blake’s experience of real cities”.<sup>200</sup> Saree Makdisi sees a mapping out of modernization in Blake’s city, the political reality of expanding empire becoming a “[...] spatial forcefield” of individual and system, community and capitalism.<sup>201</sup> Gilchrist also remains in touch with the real city, but he seems to look forward towards the modernist city of outer epiphany, rather than backwards to the mystical city of the inner temple (Paley, *The Continuing City*, p.165). Gilchrist makes the cosmopolitan the sub-text of his biography, moving Blake into a Baudelairean context of the modern city. The backdrop of London is everywhere in Gilchrist’s *Life*. Chapter II, on Blake’s childhood, opens with a definitive evocation of time and place, stating that Blake was “[b]orn amid the gloom of a London November” (*Life*, p.4). The place of his birth, Broad Street, is described in detail.

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200 Morton D. Paley, *The Continuing City: William Blake’s Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p.165.

201 Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: universal empire and the culture of modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.156.

penetrating into the social and cultural life behind that particularity.<sup>202</sup> Such detail continues throughout the biography. Sometimes it is deeply nostalgic.<sup>203</sup>

But sometimes the descriptions are literally bursting with the political turmoil that engulfed London's streets in the 1780s:

That evening, the artist happened to be walking in a route chosen by one of the mobs at large, whose course lay from Justice Hyde's house near Leicester Fields, for the destruction of which less than an hour had sufficed, through Long Acre, past the quiet house of Blake's old master, engraver Basire, in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and down Holborn, bound for Newgate. Suddenly, he encountered the advancing wave of triumphant Blackguardism, and was forced (for from such a great surging mob there is no distanglement) to go along in the very front rank, and witness the storm and burning of the fortress-like prison, and release of its three hundred inmates. (*Life*, p.30)

The historical event of the burning of Newgate is caught in a freeze frame of biographical action. The capital city is the gallery in which the authorial figure of William Blake moves.

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202 "The street is a shabby miscellany of oddly assorted occupations - lapidaries, pickle-makers, manufacturing trades of many kinds, furniture-brokers, and nondescript shops. 'Artistes' and artizans live in the upper stories. Almost every house is adorned by its triple or quadruple row of brass bells, bright with the polish of frequent hands, and yearly multiplying themselves" (*Life*, p.4).

203 "Outside, it remains pretty much as it must have looked in Blake's time: old-fashioned people having (Heaven be praised!) tenanted it ever since the first James Basire and after him his widow ended their days there. With its green paint, old casements, quiet old-fashioned shop-window, and freedom from the abomination of desolation (stucco), it retains an old-world genuine aspect, rare in London's oldest neighbourhoods, and not at war with the memories which cling around the place" (*Life*, p.19).

Gilchrist's *Life* has been read as a Carlylean homage to the Hero Poet, who is distinguished by "[...] sincerity and depth of vision", an isolated figure who "[t]he earthly world had cast forth, to wander, wander" ("Lectures on Heroes", *Sar. etc.*, pp.247 – 51). Deborah Dorfmann explicitly links Gilchrist's Blake to the Carlylean Hero Poet (*Nineteenth Century*, pp.63 – 68). While acknowledging these elements in the *Life*, Gilchrist also goes to great efforts to attach Blake to a metropolian map of creativity and vitality. The detail of London's architecture is a background linking people in a continuous historical movement. One of these moments of recognition in the *Life* occurs amid London's streets between the elderly Swedenborg and the young William Blake:

Another still more memorable figure, and a genius singularly germane to Blake's own order of mind, the "singular boy of fourteen," during the commencement of his apprenticeship, may "any day have met unwittingly in London streets, or walked beside: a placid, venerable, thin man of eighty-four, of erect figure and abstracted air, wearing a full-bottomed wig, a pair of long ruffles, and a curious-hilted sword, and carrying a gold-headed cane, - no Vision, still flesh and blood, but himself the greatest of modern Vision Seers - Emanuel Swedenborg by name; who came from Amsterdam to London, in August 1771, and died, in No. 26, Great Bath Street, Coldbath Fields, on 29th of March, 1772". (*Life*, p.13)

Alexander Gilchrist imagines a correspondence between two visionary individuals as they pass in London's streets.<sup>204</sup> Gilchrist continues to map out London in the *Life* as a

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204 "This, Mr William Allingham pleasantly suggests, in a note to his delightful collection of lyrical poems, *Nightingale Valley* (1860), in which (at last) occur a specimen or two of Blake's verse" (*Life*, p.13).

place of artistic possibility: "Already educating eye and mind in his own way, Turner, a boy of twelve, was hovering about Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, in which the barber's son was born; some half-mile - of (then) staid and busy streets - distant from Blake's Broad Street; Long Acre, in which Stothard first saw the light between the two" (*Life*, p.52). The contingency of poets and artists living side by side, leaving traces of artistic endeavour in the fabric of the city, is everywhere: "In 1793, Blake quitted Poland Street, after five years' residence there. The now dingy demi-rep street, one in which Shelley lodged in 1810, after his expulsion from Oxford, had witnessed the production of the *Songs of Innocence* and other Poetry and Design of a genus unknown, before or since, to that permanently foggy district". (*Life*, p.85)

For Gilchrist the city is a place of artistic and spiritual possibility, where the labyrinthine, Dickensian streets are lit up by moments of visionary recognition. The foggy, dense streets of London become illuminated by a historical topography of personal and artistic endeavour. As much as Gilchrist's *Life* is a biography of a unique personality, it is also a re-mapping of the metropolis as a humanist history of recognition. What Gilchrist gives us is not the ideology of the imagination but a literary landscape in which moments of epiphanic recognition may occur. The city becomes the configuring force of the imagination, as the poet-artist is not so much canonised in Parnassian idylls as secularised in urban London. London in Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* embodies Ruskin's holistic vision of architect and labourer, artist and audience.<sup>205</sup>

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205 Susan Gurewitsch, "Golgonooza on the Grand Canal: Ruskin's Stones of Venice and the romantic imagination" in *The Arnoldian: a review of mid-Victorian culture* 9 (1981), pp.25 - 39 (p.30): "Those associations of architect with labourer and artist with audience in the imaginative process already mark that process as synthetic". This view of Ruskin's relation to the city, must, however, be balanced by the full impact of Ruskin's social philosophy as regards housing reform, as described by Lewis Mumford in *The City in History: its origins, its transformations, and its prospects* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p.475.

In this way, Gilchrist draws an imagined portraiture of a human individual who sees through *and is seen through* - stands out from - the miasma of modern society. The biographer who sees the author, and the author who is seen by the biographer, are mutual reflections:

If, then, I could briefly sketch a faithful portrait of Blake's biographer, the attempt would need no apology; for if the work be of interest, so is the worker. A biographer necessarily offers himself as the mirror in which his hero is reflected; and we judge all the better of the truth and adequacy of the image by a closer acquaintance with the medium through which it comes to us.<sup>206</sup>

The mirror images of William Blake and Alexander Gilchrist reflect a social communion standing apart from society. In outlining the frameworks that enable and facilitate the modern self and human agency, Charles Taylor follows the shift of creative power from "[...]the manifestation in the flux of an impersonal Form" to "[...]the model of the self-realization of a subject" (*Sources of Self*, p.416). In what Taylor calls the "visions of the post-Romantic age", the eternal flux of the social universe is married to the internal creativity of the subjective self. The result is what Taylor, borrowing from James Joyce, calls "epiphanic" art:

In contrast to the fullness of epiphany is the sense of the world around us, as we ordinarily experience it, as out of joint, dead or forsaken. The world "in disconnection dead and spiritless", or the world as seen through Blake's vegetative eye, has some affinity with the Waste Land of Eliot. There is a continuing thread here, a critique of the mechanistic and instrumental, as a way

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206 Anne Gilchrist, "Memoir of Alexander Gilchrist" in *Life*, 1880, II, p.359.

of seeing, and as a way of living, and then as the very principle of our social existence, which runs through an immense variety of different articulations, interpretations, and suggested remedies. An allegiance to epiphanic art has almost invariably been accompanied by a strong hostility to the developing commercial-industrial-capitalist society, from Schiller to Marx to Marcuse and Adorno; from Blake to Baudelaire to Pound and Eliot. (*Sources of Self*, p.422)

In the urge towards recognition, Gilchrist's *Life* touches upon the social and aesthetic implications of the Modernist epiphany. As discussed already in this section, both Alexander Gilchrist and Swinburne take trouble to illustrate the strange isolation of Blake amidst the society of his time. Gilchrist writes of Blake in the opening of the *Life*: "It is not the least of Blake's peculiarities that, instead of expressing himself, as most men have been content to do, by help of the prevailing style of his day, he, in this, as in every other matter, preferred to be independent of his fellows" (*Life*, p.3). But Taylor sees this opposition as a double-edged sword, for what is excluded can also be included, and opposition also can be collusion:

The opposition of the visionary artist and the blind, or "philistine", "bourgeois" society brings together this vision of an exceptional fate and the hostility to commercial capitalist civilisation. United to a historical narrative of advancing discovery, it can yield the idea or myth of the avant-garde.[...].

This image expresses the opposition between artist and society - his exclusion. But it also allows for the connection, one might also say the collusion between them. [...] Moreover, once this image becomes generally accepted; once it becomes not just the self-image of the misunderstood artist, but the socially



accredited stereotype, the collusion between bourgeois and artist finds a language. (*Sources of Self*, p.424)

Blake's radicalism was still "fresh" and untainted for the outsiders of Victorian culture. His image of the self in society was so forceful that it exceeded, and continues to exceed, the neutering image of "the misunderstood artist". Blake was understood very well, on a personal, committed level, by those in the nineteenth century who believed in an individualism beyond the self, and a society beyond self-interest.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Interpreters*

The connections between individuals are vital in creating the interconnectedness of the Blake “revival”, for penetrating the aestheticism of Swinburne with the radicalism of Linton, and vice versa. The individual is the epicentre of Blake in the nineteenth century. In turn the passion and innovation of certain individuals in reclaiming Blake as a model of personal liberation had a centrifugal effect. Blake’s wider relevance as a model of heterodoxy and iconoclasm achieves a sustained voice through a few individuals connected with the Secular movement or Republicanism.

The desire and ability to recognise Blake is the *raison d’être* of the mid-nineteenth-century Blake “revival”. Recognition, “knowing anew”, defines the personal interaction of the Blake interpreters with their subject. To read the critical and biographical work of Alexander Gilchrist, James Thomson and Algernon Charles Swinburne is to be caught on the cusp of energetic excitement that infuses the personal rediscovery of Blake. Their idiosyncratic perspectives on Blake are not narcissistic indulgence, but the personal inflections of communal, shared concerns. Often they relegate important aspects of Blake’s writings and philosophy because it does not tally with their own deeply involved view of what Blake represents. What distinguishes the pioneering studies of nineteenth-century Blake criticism from later, more theoretically innovative, or historically accurate, accounts is the desire of critics to understand and re-energise Blake’s imagination for a new generation, for the cultural here and now.

Alexander Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* creates a matrix of recognition between the visionary mysticism of Blake's life in London and the spiritual redundancy of contemporary modern life. In Gilchrist's *Life* the personal becomes political through a process of spiritual recognition and regeneration. Gilchrist's Blake offers an alternative history to those Victorians who felt themselves alienated from the sterile spirituality of technology and capitalism.<sup>207</sup> Gilchrist moved next door to Carlyle when he was writing *The Life of William Blake* and Thomas Carlyle's thoughts on spiritual malaise in modern life find almost an exact echo in Gilchrist's discussion of Blake's spirituality. Carlyle's *Signs of the Times* deplores the secular worship of the material world.<sup>208</sup> For Gilchrist, Blake represents a visionary tradition that escapes the bland homogeneity of mechanical and material existence. In recognising Blake, Gilchrist's *Life* seeks to disengage the reader from an indifferent, material world.

The antipathy that Gilchrist feels towards a world devoid of religious feeling would seem to be at odds with the rejection of religion by the Secularists. But Gilchrist's *Life* is crucial in the appropriation of Blake by both avant-garde aesthetes and political radicals. Gilchrist's biography constantly strives after Blake's imagination, leading to a speculative interplay of vision and technology, of the spiritual and the profane, of the

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207 "One curious but indubitable historical fact is worth remembering here. It is full of suggestion concerning our present subject. For Blake was, in spirit, a denizen of other and earlier ages of the world than the present mechanical one to which chance had rudely transplanted him. It is within the last century or so that "the heavens have gone further off," as Hazlitt put it. The supernatural world has during that period removed itself further from civilised, cultivated humanity than it was ever before - in all time, heathen or Christian. There is, at this moment, infinitely less practical belief in an invisible world, or even apprehension of it, than at any previous historical era, whether Egyptian, classic, or medieval" (*Life*, pp.323 - 24).

208 Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times" in *Selected Writings*, ed. Alan Shelston (Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), pp.59 - 85, (p.77): "The truth is, men have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe, and hope, and work only in the Visible. This is not a religious age. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us. The infinite, absolute character of Virtue has passed into a finite, conditional one; it is no longer a worship of the Beautiful and Good; but a calculation of the

mystical and the material.<sup>209</sup> Although Gilchrist's *Life* may conclude that Blake was a man of "[...]childlike, simple faith" (*Life*, p.352), the biography is littered with wormholes that lead to other social, political and cultural dimensions, and which other nineteenth-century explorers of Blake utilise.

One point of displacement being played out in Gilchrist's description of Blake, embracing both historical or aesthetic dislocation, is technological alienation. The estrangement of divided labour is not the end-point for Gilchrist. Instead mechanical alienation leads into a discussion of spiritual personality; Blake's visionary distance from the scientific positivism of the age is tempered by recognition of Blake as part of a visionary history lost to contemporary culture. For Gilchrist, Blake's visionary capacity seems to go hand in hand with an aesthetic rejection of the mechanical age. Blake is presented as a God-like child in a Godless world. The representation of Blake by Gilchrist as "[...] an other-worldly enthusiast" (*Nineteenth Century*, p.100) is the first link in a chain that unites the backward-looking aestheticism of the Blake revival to the forward-facing problems of social organisation in a secular society. The recognition of Blake as other than the *status quo* is the guiding principle of Gilchrist's *Life* and the template that facilitated the adoption of Blake as one of radical culture's own in the later-nineteenth century. Gilchrist describes Blake as a spiritual radical, a mystical dissenter: "I have spoken of Blake's daring heterodoxy on religious topics. He not only believed in a pre-existent state, but had adopted, or thought out for himself, many of the

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Profitable. Worship, indeed in any sense, is not recognised among us, or is mechanically explained into Fear of pain, or Hope of pleasure. Our true Deity is mechanism".

209 "It is *only* within the last century and a half the faculty of seeing visions could have been one to bring a man's sanity into question. Ever before, by simple, believing Romanist, by reverent, awestruck pagan, or in the fervent East, the exceptional power had been accepted as a matter of course in gifted men, and had been turned to serious account in the cause of religion. Even so late a manifestation of this abiding tendency (the visionary) in all spiritual persons, as that in the case of Jakob Boehme in Lutheran time, excited, not sceptical disbelief, but pedantic hostility as, presumably, a delusive gift from the Father of Evil rather than from the Author of all Good" (*Life*, pp.324).

ideas of the early Gnostics; and was otherwise so erratic in his religious opinions as to shock orthodox Churchmen” (*Life*, p.326).

In Alexander Gilchrist’s *The Life of William Blake* there is already a strange mixture of mystical vision and secular pragmatism. The result is a very earthly enthusiast and an all too human visionary:

I think it may not be superfluous to take into account here, as we did when first alluding to these notes on Reynolds, all the sources of Blake’s hostility towards the universally admired and extolled prince of English portrait painting. The deepest of these was the honest contempt of a man with high spiritual aims for one whose goal, though honourable, and far above common attainment, was at as widely different an altitude from Blake’s as the mere earthly hill-top from the star which shines down upon it. Hence the entire antagonism of their views: for such different ends must be reached by wholly different means. It is no invalidation of this high claim for Blake to add that the vivid contrast of their respective lots was another source; for *recognition* is dear to every gifted man, however unworldly, however sincere his indifference to those goods of fortune which ordinarily accompany recognition, but are the mere accidents of which that is the precious substance”. (*Life*, pp.274 – 275)

Gilchrist steers a course between spiritual endeavour and petty emotion. He could just have come out and said that Blake was jealous of Reynolds. But in navigating between celestial inspiration and worldly ambition, Gilchrist delineates the equilibrium between cultural vision and aesthetic identification. The emphasis is upon *recognition*. Gilchrist pursues the dialectic between the visionary artist and the social and economic realities

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of his labouring life. *The Life of William Blake* is an open dialogue between spiritual heritage and cultural neglect. Recognition in the *Life* is an aesthetic trope.

The 1880 expanded edition of *The Life of William Blake* contains in the second volume a memoir of Alexander Gilchrist by Anne Gilchrist. Anne talks of “dear Alec’s” future projects, which included a planned biography of Wordsworth. Anne’s description of biography is not genealogical. It does not trace the poet’s place in literary history. Anne figures visual tropes as keynotes for both the biographer and reader in deciphering the life of the biographical subject: “[...]to create a small gallery of portraits in which the lover of literature should linger with as curious an interest as does the antiquary amid the relics of the past” (“Memoir”, *Life*, 1889, II, p.374). The portrait and gallery tropes in Anne’s memoir of her husband are a continuum from *The Life of William Blake*. Both Anne and Alexander Gilchrist emphasise recognition by the spectator in their biographical writings. What is particularly emphasised in these moments of recognition is the coming together of historical difference between the object and the spectator. Anne Gilchrist compares the biographical portrait to “the relics of the past” and the “lover of literature” to an “antiquary”. At another juncture in the memoir, Anne describes visiting art galleries and sites of architectural interest with her husband. They encounter art and architecture with an eye born from Ruskin, reading history in holistic beauty: “[...] every stone of which was scanned till it yielded up its quota of history, as well as of the meaning and the beauty of the whole” (“Memoir”, *Life*, 1880, II, p.370). The way in which the Gilchrists read art is predicated upon the historical and history as part of an aesthetic whole. This perspective informs *The Life of Blake* and aims to recall history, connecting the temporal to the eternal, the individual with the special. Literature and biography become correlative points forming a constellation between different points in history. What configures this historical constellation is the aesthetic eye of the

reader. Gilchrist constantly extols the reader of the *Life* to *look*. The 1863 and 1880 editions of the *Life* are designed to be eye-catching. Samuel Palmer, writing to Anne Gilchrist after the publication of the *Life*, describes the biography as “[...] the richest Book of all illustrated ones I have ever seen”.<sup>210</sup> Samuel Palmer, one of the Felpham disciples, was inclined by talent and temperament to promote visual recognition above mental cognition: “Talent *thinks*, Genius *sees*; and what organ so accurate as sight. Blake held this strongly”.<sup>211</sup> Palmer’s reading of Blake is written as a personal moment of visionary revelation. Gilchrist widens that moment of revelation for the Victorian reader in general.

Gilchrist brings the inner life of Blake’s imagination into relief against the reader’s reality. The spectator is presented with Blake’s imagination as a power that requires a particular type of reading. Gilchrist does not specify how to read Blake. He says at one point that “[...]one must almost be born with a sympathy for it” (*Life*, p.2). We are told to look at Blake’s works, but there is no attempt to “show and tell”, to intrude upon the experience of seeing Blake’s work:

At Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, among the select thousand water-colour drawings, hung two modestly tinted designs by Blake, of few inches in size: one *The Dream of Queen Catherine*, another *Oberon and Titania asleep on a Lily*. Both are remarkable displays of imaginative power, and finished examples in the artist’s peculiar manner. Both were unnoticed in the crowd, attracting few gazers, fewer admirers. For it need to be read in Blake, to

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210 Samuel Palmer to Anne Gilchrist, November 1863 in *Anne Gilchrist: her life and writings*, ed. H.H. Gilchrist, with a prefatory notice by W.M. Rossetti (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), p.143. Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Anne Gilchrist*, followed by page number(s).

211 Letter from Samuel Palmer to Anne Gilchrist, July 2 1862 in *The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter & Etcher*, ed. A. H. Palmer (London: Seeley & Co., 1892), p.246.

have familiarized oneself with his unsophisticated, archaic yet spiritual “manner” - a style *sui generis* as no other artist’s ever was - to be able to sympathize with, or even understand, the equally individual strain of thought of which it is the vehicle. (*Life*, p.2)

In establishing the visual trope of recognition so early in the biography, Gilchrist agitates the communal memory for recognition of Blake. The biography is from the outset an odyssey of the seeing eye. Gilchrist creates a critical “kaleidoscope of consciousness” which, as we begin to look at Blake’s works, slides in another frame in which it is our looking that has become the focus.

Gilchrist’s *Life* certainly rests on a knife-edge between the aesthetic sanctity of Blake and the socio-political realities of his life. Deborah Dorfmann describes Gilchrist’s Blake as a man of “[...] ardent and innocent enthusiasm” (*Nineteenth Century*, p.70) a touchstone of avant-garde untouchability. Gilchrist’s presentation of Blake attempts to do a lot, to suggest both aesthetic removal from life and social volition within life: “It was a favourite dogma of Blake’s, not, certainly, learned of the political economists, that the true power of society depends on its recognition of the arts” (*Life*, p.246). Blake is seen as a social visionary, empowering society through the agency of art. At the same time, he is seen as disengaging from the urgent political economy of his day. Bourgeois refuge from the agonies of life seems to be suggested. But, as I have argued, life - in all its glorious technicolour - is pressingly omnipotent in Gilchrist’s *Life*. Furthermore, Gilchrist’s *Life* in the 1863 edition does not find an easy language of collusion “between bourgeois and artist”. Anne Gilchrist tells us that Alexander’s desire to identify with the biographical subject sometimes obscured the grammatical force of the whole narrative: “He desired always to treat his subject exhaustively; as a critic to enter into close



companionship with his author or painter: to stand hand in hand with him, seeing the same horizon, listening, pondering, absorbing. No subtlest shade of meaning, no shifting hue of beauty should escape him or his reader if he could help it. Hence the difficulty of obtaining concentration; of making due sacrifice of detail to the force of the whole. Hence, at first, a thicket of adjectives in labyrinthine sentences" ("Memoir", *Life*, 1880, II, p.369).

The biographical detail that Anne Gilchrist describes as a preoccupation for her husband is manifested as "subtlest shade of meaning" and "shifting hue of beauty". There is a deep sensuality imbedded in Anne's description of Alexander's labyrinthine language. Suggestions of Bourgeois collusion - images of Blake patronised into the politically autistic pet of the *avant-garde*<sup>212</sup> - are undone, irrelevant. Critic and reader are encouraged to see Blake anew, as Gilchrist's critical aesthetic comes to pre-empt the Modernist epiphany. The overriding force of Gilchrist's *Life* is the desire to open the eyes of the reader to Blake. It is a book full of feeling, of sensuous moments of looking and listening. The force of detail that comes from "seeing the same horizon, listening, pondering, absorbing" is aporetic. It is the missed vision of the biographer - what cannot be clearly seen - that enables the epiphanies of vision between author, biographer and reader. The biographer invites the reader into the flux of the historical subject's life. Blake is seen as part of the crowded continuum of human life, as well as a special example, a hero-poet. It is the uninterpreted areas of blankness in the life and work that allows the literary biography, *The Life of William Blake*, to open up to the reader's own subjective vision. As if to point to this clearing of interpretation, Gilchrist celebrates "incompleteness" and the "unfinished" in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*:

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212 T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: essays on poetry and criticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1920), p.137: "If one follows Blake's mind through the several stages of his development it is impossible to regard him

First of the poems let me speak, harsh as seems their divorce from the design which blends with them, forming warp and woof in one texture. It is like pulling up a daisy by the roots from the greensward out of which it springs. To me many years ago, first reading these weird songs in their appropriate environment of equally spiritual form and hue, the effect was as that of an angelic voice singing to oaten pipe, such as Arcadians tell of; or as if a spiritual magician were summoning before human eyes, and through a human medium, images and scenes of divine loveliness; and in the pauses of the strain we seem to catch the rustling of angelic wings. The Golden Age independent of space or time, object of vague sighs and dreams from many generations of struggling humanity - an Eden such as childhood sees - is brought nearer than ever poet brought it before. [...] They are *unfinished* poems; yet would finish have bettered their bold and careless freedom? Would it not have brushed away the delicate bloom? that visible spontaneity, so rare and great a charm, the eloquent attribute of our old English ballads and of the early songs of all nations. The most deceptively perfect wax model is no substitute for the living flower. The form is, in these songs, a transparent medium of the spiritual thought, not an opaque body. (*Life*, pp.62 – 62)

The entire key of Aestheticism and Pre-Raphaelitism would seem to be sounded in this passage: the nostalgia for an idealised “Arcadian” past, the transcendental desire for a “Golden Age” undefined by space or time, the secular-mysticism of “a spiritual magician” corresponding through “human eyes, and through a “human medium”, the opium-tinted detail of dreaming transfiguration. But it is in the respect of detail and form that Gilchrist distinguishes his work from Aesthetic formalism. It does not detract from the “spiritual sight” of Blake’s works that the aesthetic and formal details are

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as naïf, a wild man, a wild pet for the supercultivated”.

imperfect. Gilchrist is an epiphanic critic, celebrating the fulness of the experience between spectator and creator.

Swinburne opens *William Blake* with a polemic on Blake's belief:

In a time of critical reason and definite division, he was possessed by a fervour and fury of belief; among sane men who had disproved most things and proved the rest, here was an evident madman who believed a thing, one may say, only insomuch as it was incapable of proof. He lived and worked out of all rule, and yet by law. He had a devil, and its name was Faith. No materialist has such belief in bread and meat as Blake had in the substance underlying appearance which he christened god or spectre, devil or angel, as the fit took him; or rather as he saw it from one side or the other side. [...]. His outcries on various matters of art or morals were in effect the mere expression, not of reasonable dissent, but of violent belief. No artist of equal power had ever a keener and deeper regard for the meaning and teaching - what one may call the moral - of art. He sang and painted as men write or preach. Indifference was impossible to him. Thus every shred of his work has some life, some blood, infused or woven into it. (*AS*, pp.4 - 5)

Swinburne's "flesh and blood" Blake is a tangle of mysticism, aestheticism and secularism. Whereas Gilchrist aims to gently clear a space in which the reader can approach Blake, Swinburne summons up iconoclastic bravura, aiming to shock the reader into recognising Blake's daring uniqueness. Nowhere is this more apparent than in *William Blake: a critical essay*. For Swinburne, critical iconoclasm is a poetic act. And William Blake is his rebellious mentor: "He was born and baptized into the church of rebels; we can hardly imagine a time or scheme of things in which he could have lived and worked without some interval of revolt. All that was accepted for art, all that

was taken for poetry, he rejected as barren symbols, and would fain have broken up as mendacious idols” (*AS*, p.3).

Swinburne opens the essay with the smashing of aesthetic idols. In doing so Aestheticism comes of age as criticism. It enters the socio-political discourse of history and historical difference. Swinburne talks of Blake’s theology in terms of imaginative and poetic revolution, relishing Blake’s potential as a heretic against the scientific rationalism and “quasi-secular clericalism” of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>213</sup>

Swinburne’s aestheticism - his “Art for Art’s sake” manifesto - tears down the material and theological “edifices” that construct a teleological fate for humanity, whether that fate is evolutionary or theocentric.<sup>214</sup>

Swinburne’s aestheticism is the most politically charged of the post-Romantics. For M.K. Louis, Swinburne recapitulates, in an English idiom, the vehemence of continental sedition: “Such poets as Walter Savage Landor or Algernon Charles Swinburne, allying themselves with the forces of continental liberalism, helped to sustain a theologically and politically radical tradition within English literature throughout the Victorian period”.<sup>215</sup> Twentieth-century critical appraisal of Swinburne’s political radicalism has tended to ally the political impetus of the poetry with the theological insurgence of Swinburne’s thought. An elegant argument by M. K. Louis postulates that there is a fundamental transfer in Swinburne’s writing between the Eucharist as sacred symbol.

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213 “Rational deism and clerical religion were to him two equally abhorrent incarnations of the same evil spirit, appearing now as negation and now as restriction. He wanted supremacy of freedom with intensity of faith. Hence he was properly neither Christian nor infidel: he was emphatically a heretic” (*AS*, p.89).

214 “Such men, according to the temper of the times, are burnt as demoniacs or pitied as lunatics. [...]. He was the very man for fire and faggot; a mediaeval inquisitor would have no more doubt about him than a materialist or ‘theophilanthropist’ of his own day or ours” (*AS*, pp.189 – 190).

215 M.K. Louis, “Swinburne, Clough, and the Speechless Christ: ‘Before a Crucifix’ and ‘Easter Day’” in *Victorian Newsletter* 72 (1987), pp.1 – 5 (p.3).

and the Eucharist as a symbol of political and aesthetic communion.<sup>216</sup> The Biblical lexicon of Redemption and Sacrifice becomes in Swinburne's work, as it does in Blake's, recognisant of political volition.<sup>217</sup> In Jerome McGann's critical dialogue *Swinburne*, the *Book of Revelation* is a template for politically apocalyptic verse and the metaphorical slaying of didactic Gods.<sup>218</sup>

The vigour of Swinburne's poetic apocalypse illustrates the difference between the revelatory recognition of Blake in Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake*, and Swinburne's political and moral empathy with Blake in *William Blake: a critical essay*. Like Gilchrist, Swinburne sees history as configured out of epiphanic moments. But for Swinburne, these moments are revolutionary in their potential. The theological path he traces in Blake's prophetic books moves from apocalypse to revolution: "As their first word had been Revelation, their last was Revolution" (*AS*, p.258). His model for history is not theocentric or organic. Instead, Swinburne inflects the relationship of history and humanity with a mystical accent, even suggesting the metempsychosis of poetic spirit.<sup>219</sup>

Swinburne's heralding of "Art for Art's sake" in *William Blake* is emphatically not the creation of an aesthetic monument where "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', that is all/ Ye

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216 M. K. Louis, *Swinburne and His Gods: the roots and growth of an agnostic poetry* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990), pp. 63 – 69.

217 "But the sacrament of communion also serves Swinburne as an image of political union, or of the sacrifice through which Man may achieve political redemption in the shape of the united Republic, the heavenly Jerusalem upon earth" (Louis, *Swinburne and His Gods*, p.63).

218 Jerome J. McGann, *Swinburne: an experiment in criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p.248.

219 "I was much struck by the passage in your last letter to me, where you speak of the Theory of Transmigration. Whether or not it be affirmed or denied by spirits I know that it has always appeared to me a very probable article of faith", Algernon Charles Swinburne, "To Seymour Kirkup (August 11, 1865)", in *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), II, p.128. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Swin. Letts.*, followed by volume and page number(s).

know on earth, and all ye need to know”.<sup>220</sup> Swinburne’s aestheticism - particularly where Blake is concerned - is not ideology gone to seed in a wasteland of bourgeois decadence, emptied of political or social content. The “Art for Art’s sake” “exposition” (AS, pp.85ff) in *William Blake* is explicitly a reaction against “the great moral heresy” (AS, p.92). In using this expression, Swinburne refers to Baudelaire’s “the heresy of instruction” or “*l’hérésie de l’enseignement*” (AS, p.92). Swinburne elaborates upon this moral heresy, terming it the “[...]flatulent assumptions of quasi-secular clericalism” (AS, p.92). Swinburne is clarifying confusion concerning art’s role in a secular society. Rather than a simple denial of art as social or political commentary, Swinburne’s aestheticism attacks art that is orthodox, hegemonic and morally prescriptive:

Priest and poet, all those times through, were proverbially on terms of reciprocal biting and striking. That magnificent invention of making “Art the handmaid of Religion” had not been stumbled upon in the darkness of those days. Neither minstrel nor monk would have caught up the idea with any rapture. As indeed they would have been unwise to do; for the thing is impossible. Art is not like fire or water, a good servant and bad master; rather the reverse. She will help in nothing of her own knowledge or freewill: upon terms of service you will get worse than nothing out of her. Handmaid of religion, exponent of duty, servant of fact, pioneer of morality, she cannot in any way become: she would be none of these things though you were to bray her in a mortar. (AS, p.90)

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220 John Keats, “Ode to a Grecian Urn” in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1970), pp.532 – 537 (p.537)

Swinburne says that his exposition of “Art for Art’s sake” is crucial as a prelude to the study of Blake’s poetry: “Error on this point would be ruinous to any student” (*AS*, p.93). Swinburne reads Blake’s theology through Blake’s poetry. Blake’s poetry is not divested of ethical or political comment in Swinburne’s interpretation. But “faith or principle” (*AS*, p.94) is redesigned through poetic imagination.

Swinburne’s aestheticism in *William Blake* is a triumph of the imagination over the “material” and the “moral”. Swinburne, in a hardline attack on morality in art, talks about “[...] reversing the principle of moral or material duty” (*AS*, p.87). The parallelism between the material and the moral aligns the empirical world with a world of religious orthodoxy. In this sense, the moral and the material are both coefficients in an aesthetic economy. They combine to position art in an empty exchange between absolutes. In his public polemic on Art for Art’s sake, Swinburne aims to divest art of all value systems. All that matters is that art is motivated by “imaginative work and insight” as the “first principle” (*AS*, p.94). However, in private correspondence, Swinburne replaces the material and moral with the spiritual and democratic, and grows increasingly explicit in cojoining these to Republican politics. Almost alone among the Pre-Raphaelite revivalists, he explicitly calls for the reproduction of Blake in a form conducive to the spiritual and democratic, to the Universal Republic:

But I abstain, (for once) in print, because I want to see what I hope may yet be achieved by subscription - a complete or quasi-complete edition of Blake’s works; photographs thoroughly well done of his chief drawings; artistic engravings of his chief pictures or “frescos,” to use his own term; and a full though critical edition of his writings. Then only one of the greatest of Englishmen - a poet when there was no poet - an artist when



there was hardly an artist - a republican under the very shadow of the gibbet which George III (who flung Blake's drawings away when they were laid before his miserable blind eyes) had prepared for all such men - a lover of America, of freedom, and of France from the first to the last - the one single man in London who dared go out with the red cap on his head (not through bravado, but simply as a matter of principle) - then only, I say, will this great man be understood. It seems to me that Walt Whitman belongs to the same race of men; and if so, I am certain he will understand the mystical heterodox "prophecies" of Blake which the publishers of his biography and remains were afraid of, but which I intend to bring before the world.<sup>221</sup>

This is an important letter on several counts. Firstly, it is *prima facie* evidence of the highly politicised nature of reproducing Blake in the mid-nineteenth century. Swinburne's emphasis on the Republican Blake is part of a tradition he sees continued in the works of Walt Whitman. Swinburne's comments, uniting the two against the orthodoxy of their respective ages, confirm Blake's utter relevance to nineteenth-century literary and political radicalism. The quasi-religious language in which Swinburne talks of these poets' "gospels" signals Swinburne's own position as a prophet of the new religion of Aestheticism, albeit a heretical prophet in his fervour, his anti-materialism and mystical cant. In his reception of Blake and Whitman, Swinburne was in some senses turning his social and political frustrations into the intimacy of artistic congeniality, communing man to man. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick sees the English reception of Whitman as such an unleashing of political comradeship.<sup>222</sup> Swinburne suggests that a mystical communion

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221 Letter to M.D. Conway, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1866 (*Swin. Letts.*, I, p.209).

222 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English literature and male homosocial desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.199 – 200.

would exist between Blake and Whitman as a shared language of interpretation, allowing Whitman to “understand the mystical heterodox ‘prophecies’ of Blake”. This unites Swinburne’s understanding of Blake to the secular mysticism of the Secularists and of James Thomson. The emergence of Blake as an “unacknowledged legislator” within the writings of individuals such as Swinburne and groups such as the Secular society, takes Blake’s own dialectical relationship with the theology of the late eighteenth century, and inflects it with the crisis of fully fledged modernity. The presence of Blake in the midst of latter day radicals such as James Thomson and William James Linton also serves as proof of the nineteenth century’s reception of Blake as a revolutionary and iconoclastic artist. Swinburne finishes his letter with a reference to mystical heterodoxy, pointing back to the addressee of the letter, Moncure Conway, the abolitionist, secularist and transcendentalist.

Swinburne, however, moves beyond the Secularists in realising the powerful psychology of Blake’s symbols. Swinburne explores symbolism in Blake’s works as an active entity, realising the importance of Blake’s works as landscapes of psychological symbolism. In the 1863 edition of Gilchrist’s *The Life of William Blake*, Anne Gilchrist writes in the preface: “But however small may be the literary value of the *Europe, America, Jerusalem, &c.*, they are at least psychologically curious and important; and should the opportunity arise, I hope to see these gaps filled in with workmanship which shall better correspond with that of the rest of the fabric”.<sup>223</sup> Swinburne’s *William Blake: a critical essay* attempts to fill the hermeneutic gap that Anne Gilchrist calls “psychologically curious”. Swinburne does this by describing the aporias within Blake’s own work as creations of the human psyche:

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223 Anne Gilchrist, “Preface”, *Life* (1863), I, p.xi.

Between the former of these and *The Human Abstract* there is a certain difference: here, the moral point of the poem is, that innocence is wholly ignorant, and sees no deeper than the shell of form; experience is mainly malignant, and sees the root of evil and seed of pain under the leaf of good and blossom of pleasant things: there, the vision is the poet's own, and deals with that evil neither actually nor seemingly inherent in the system or scheme of created nature, but watered into life by the error and fed into luxuriance by the act of "the human brain" alone. (*AS*, p.147)

A psychological discourse emerges in Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay*, and gives added complexity to the rhetoric of materialism and morality already at play in the essay. This is the real significance and force of Swinburne's essay. Swinburne's strange configuration of the material takes on new nuances of meaning. The twinning of the moral and the material in phrases such as "moral or material duty" or "material virtue". can now be seen as symbolic constructions *referring to the individual's internalisation of an abstracted social order*. Swinburne, through Blake, is engaging in Romanticism's struggle between aestheticism and ideology.<sup>224</sup> The self-reflexivity of "Art for Art's sake" in *William Blake: a critical essay* is not the fatal narcissism of aestheticism gone astray, but a political strategy confronting the alienation of capitalist materialism.

Swinburne is deeply engaged with the struggles of Blake's works, which sometimes results in a hiatus of sense or even form. Swinburne's essay is a great exercise in the

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224 Paul Hamilton, "'A Shadow of A Magnitude': the dialectic of romantic aesthetics" in *Beyond Romanticism: new approaches to texts and contexts 1780 – 1832*, eds Stephen Copley and John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992), p.11 – 31 (p.15): "Equally, internalisation is why Romanticism is such a rich source or precursor to psychoanalysis which claims to restore a political dimension to internalisation. Internalisation becomes not a bowdlerised translation of external political forces, but a power structure showing on its own terms the mechanisms by which the prohibitions necessary for acceptance into the symbolic order are enforced",

blindness and insight of aesthetic praxis,<sup>225</sup> a moment in the 1860s when literature and humanity come together in an experimental and tentative psychological discourse. Swinburne is the first critic of Blake to move beyond the question “Was Blake Mad?”, and to engage the works within a new sphere of psychological symbolism. The beauty and force of Swinburne’s *William Blake* comes partially from a poet talking about another poet in bursts of Bacchic energy, pushing at the limits of interpretation. But the critical value of the essay is the interpretation that frames the poetic frenzy and creates a new critical and aesthetic perspective. Swinburne understands that Blake’s poetry is at the very edge of literature, not because it is mad, but because it deals in the creation of madness, as Swinburne’s comments on “The Human Abstract” demonstrate: “Only in the ‘miscreative brain’ of fallen men can such a thing strike its tortuous root and bring forth its fatal flower; nowhere else in all nature can the tyrants of divided matter and moral law, ‘Gods of the earth and sea,’ find soil that will bear such fruit” (*AS*, p.121). Those twin pillars of repression signal the complexity of how Swinburne reads the formation of the “miscreative brain”. Swinburne’s reading is particularly charged here because of the hermeneutic leap that it refuses to make. He does not complete the aetiology of the “miscreative brain”. Is the brain psychologically faulty, and the tyrannical repression exerted by materialism and moral law a natural result of natural causes? Or do exterior forces corrupt the brain? Or yet again, is it the brain that adulterates phenomenological data? Swinburne’s diction is electrified by an intuition that unites the dissenting tradition with the psychological pressures of the secularised.

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225 In the introduction to the 1970 reprint of *William Blake: a critical essay*, Hugh J. Luke writes: “It is true enough, certainly, that Swinburne was at least half-blind to a number of things which have come to the light of day during our own century of Blake studies. His vision was limited by personal predilection and by cultural myopia, by the remnants of a theory of ‘art for art’s sake,’ by the dark cloud and cloudy ways of an untrodden land into which he alone had yet dared venture” (*AS*, pp.xii – xiii).

atomised individual. The Antinomian revolt against the “moral law” is enjoined to the Aesthetic retreat from mechanical materialism or capitalism.<sup>226</sup>

Swinburne takes the sovereign individual within capitalist society and re-examines the effect of “moral law and divided matter” upon the inner experience of the psychological being. Swinburne finds in Blake’s works an aesthetic model for his proto-psychological interpretation. A Gnostic inheritance is teamed with the poetics of inner experience, which is expressed as both sovereign and communal. Swinburne uses some of Blake’s most powerful poetry as a vehicle to ask some fundamental ontological questions, thrown up by the inexplicable relationship of material and spiritual creation:

Could god bring down his heart to the making of a thing so deadly and strong?  
Or could any lesser daemonic force of nature take to itself wings and fly high  
enough to assume power equal to such a creation? Could spiritual force so far  
descend or material force so far aspire? Or, when the very stars, and all the  
armed children of heaven, the “helmed cherubim” that guide the “sworded  
seraphim” that guard their several planets, wept for pity and fear at the sight of  
this new force of monstrous matter seen in the deepest night as a fire of menace  
to man –

“Did he smile his work to see?

Did he who made the lamb make thee?” (*AS*, p.120)

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226 A. L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel: a study in the sources of William Blake* (New York: Haskell House, 1966), p.22 – 23, sees the relationship between Gnosticism and materialism as the battleground of Blake’s mystical works: “He [Blake] acknowledged the positive merit in Voltaire and Paine of attacking orthodox Christianity, which, to him, was ‘Satan’s Synagogue’. He condemned them, as he condemned Bacon, Newton and Locke, not so much because they were rationalists as because they were mechanical materialists. This mechanical materialism was the doctrine of capitalism in its age of growth and was accepted almost universally by both progressives and reactionaries”.

Swinburne's proto-psychological probing of Blake's poetry has wider social connotations than metaphysical musings. In Blake's writing, the mysterious figuration of the human through the non-human facilitates a pre-Freudian symbolism of the unconscious. This is not because Blake's mythological characters are read as positive symbols of the id or ego or super-ego, but because they negate simple questions of morality. The question instead becomes one of negative humanism and negative creation.

The description of Dante Gabriel Rossetti as an exponent of the humanist approach to William Blake may seem to be at odds with the Pre-Raphaelite return to Medievalism.<sup>227</sup> In his art and poetry Rossetti fuses the Gothic imagination of the Medieval with nineteenth-century realism. The result is humanism not so much concerned with empowerment, as with the expression of human experience and an aesthetic that touches the mystical through the material. This is how Rossetti fashions theology and religious symbolism in poems such as "Ave": "Thou once wert sister sisterlike!/ Thou headstone of humanity./ Groundstone of the great Mystery./ Fashioned like us, yet more than we".<sup>228</sup> Isobel Armstrong's comments on "The Blessed Damozel" could equally apply to "Ave": "The poem is asking in what way we perceive the mystical body through the physical body and how we invest the material with significance" (*Victorian Poetry*, p.247). Similarly, Rossetti asks the reader to invest the material presence of Blake's works with human significance. In his commentary upon Blake's poetry in the second volume of Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake*, the presence of the human individual, and the empathy of the reader with that presence, takes precedence over everything else, be it political, social, or theological. This can be seen in Rossetti's comparison of the two "Chimney Sweeper" poems from the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*: "For instance, there is no comparison between the first Chimney Sweep, which touches with such perfect simplicity the true pathetic chord of its subject, and the second, tinged merely with the common-places of social discontent".<sup>229</sup>

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227 John Carroll, *Humanism: the wreck of western culture* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), pp.6 – 7.

228 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Ave" in *Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: with a memoir of the author by Franz Hüffer* (Leipzig: Bernard Tauchnitz, 1873), p.41.

229 Commentary on Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (*Life* 1863, II, p.25).

The self, the personality of the individual, is at the centre of Rossetti's aesthetic. For Rossetti, Blake's attraction is not in his ability to transcend the material world, but in his expression and experience of living as a poet-artisan within it:

In each style of the art of a period, and more especially the poetic style, there is often some one central derivative man, to whom personally, if not to the care of the world, it is important that his creative power should be held to be his own, and that his ideas and slowly perfected materials should not be caught up before he has them ready for his own use.<sup>230</sup>

“Derivative” suggests a continuum, which in the context of Rossetti's comments may mean the material history that the artist brings to his work or the derivation of the artist's work by others. Either way, the presence of the artist, expressed in the slowly wrought materialism of the artisan's works, is at the centre. For Rossetti, materialism is always subjugated to human feeling and experience. Sometimes his commentary seems to have literally entered the human experience that Blake has created in his poetry, as in the commentary upon “Broken Love”, his alternative title to “My Spectre”:

Let her weep he says, not for his sins only, but for her own: nay, he will cast his sins upon her shoulders too: they shall be more and more till she come to him again. Also this woe of his can array itself in stately imagery. He can count separately how many of his soul's affections the knife she stabbed it with has slain, how many yet mourn over the tombs which he built for these: he can tell, too, of some that still watch around his bed, bright sometimes with ecstatic

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230 Commentary on Blake's “Prose Writings” (*Life* 1863, II, p.118).



passion of melancholy, and crowning his mournful bed with vine. All these living forgive her transgressions: when will she look upon them, that the dead may live again? Has she not pity to give pardon? Nay, does he not need her pardon too? he cannot seek her, but oh! If she would return! Surely her place is ready for her, and bread and wine of forgiveness of sins.<sup>231</sup>

Rossetti takes the complexity of an internal voice crying in a barely recognisable metaphysical landscape, and personalises it. What is lost in this commentary is a sense of the bizarreness of Blake's poem, as well as an engagement with Blake's proto-psychological symbolism and mystical metaphysics. Rossetti is aware of the strangeness and obscurity of the poem, but he does not see this as the root of its aesthetic power, nor as a viable route for its "human" interpretation:

I have dwelt on the meaning of this poem, because it is one which, from the figurative form given to it, might be accounted specially obscure. But in reality, it is perhaps the only instance in which Blake has dwelt with any of the deeper phases of human passion: and though the way of dealing with it is all his own, the result is as startlingly true as it is grand and impressive, and gives rise to regret that this poet did not oftener elect to walk in the ways, not of spirits or children, but of living men". ("Poems Hitherto Unpublished", *Life* 1863, pp.76 – 7)

Rossetti's aesthetic strategy is to see the "figurative form" as a disruption of expression, as an example of the obscurity and darker mental phases of Blake's writings which "greatly mar [their] poetic value".<sup>232</sup> When I come to examine Rossetti's editing

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231 Commentary on "Poems Hitherto Unpublished" (*Life* 1863, II, p.76).

232 Commentary on *Songs of Innocence* (*Life*, 1863, II, p.25).

techniques, “poetic value” will be to the forefront, rather than Faith to an authorial text. The way to interpret Blake for Rossetti is to listen and see the human story, to touch upon the “deeper phases of human passion”. Swinburne and Thomson adopt different tactics, but continue to be interested in that “human story”.

*James Thomson*

In James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*, poetry is not prophetic, celebrating a society liberated from the phantoms of superstition and religion by scientific progress. Poetry is pessimistic in an apocalyptic realm, focused upon the isolation of the individual who is divorced from both social fraternity and spiritual revelation. The reason of the Secular community gives way to the alienation of the secularised city, a landscape of esoteric codes and fragmented voices.

But James Thomson's city is not like Gilchrist's. For Thomson, the city is place of human displacement and alienation. Thomson's location of Blake in London has nothing to do with recognition and everything to do with isolation:

He came to the desert of London town

Grey miles long;

He wandered up and wandered down,

Singing a quiet song.

He came to the desert of London town,

Mirk miles broad;

He wandered up and he wandered down,

Ever alone with God.

There were thousands and thousands of human kind

In this desert of brick and stone:

But some were deaf and some were blind,

And he was there alone.

At length the good hour came; he died,

As he had lived, alone:

He was not missed from the desert wide,

*Perhaps he was found at the Throne*<sup>233</sup>

This is the territory of *City of Dreadful Night*, Thomson's most famous and notorious poem. Thomson's city is populated by those who are alone, broken free from God, yet still oppressed by the metaphysical angst of simply being: "There is no God; no Fiend with names divine/ Made us and tortures us; if we must pine./ It is to satiate no Being's gall" (*City of Dreadful Night*, p.36). The city is a critical space for both Thomson's Blake poem and the *Dreadful Night*. Unlike Gilchrist's *Life*, Thomson's metropolis is not a triumphant symbol of human communion. Instead the metropolis symbolises the superabundance of materialism. The "desert of London town", where William Blake wanders up and down, is a "desert of brick and stone". The human, silent, language of *The City of Dreadful Night* is formed materially. Vibrations are "wrought", and the unarticulated thoughts and passion - the spirit, if you like - of the isolated human voices are breathed into the voiceless language until it is physically overladen, "fraught and overfraught" (*City of Dreadful Night*, p.39). There is a desperate parody of aestheticism in the material fragments of "*objet d'art*" that emerge through the darkness of the city.

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233 "The Poems of William Blake", first printed in *National Reformer* 7 (January 14, 21, 28 and February 4 1866). Reprinted in *Shelley, a poem: with other writings relating to Shelley, by the late James Thomson (B.V.) to which is added an essay on the poems of William Blake, by the same author* (printed for private circulation at the Chiswick Press, 1884), p.128. Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Blake/Shelley*, followed by page number(s).

Isobel Armstrong sees the climax of the poem as redefining Blake's figure of Newton, the prophet of a materialist universe.<sup>234</sup>

Thomson's city is a place of negative creation. Gone are the criss-crossing of visionary meeting-points, or the traces of artistic production lingering in specified London streets and houses, that we find in Gilchrist's *Life*. Instead isolated symbols, such as the parody of Blake's *Ancient of Days* and Newton, which Isobel Armstrong has identified, dominate. In Gilchrist's *Life*, the city is a symbolic configuration of the deeper lying correspondences between human individuals. The city as symbol in Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* recalls Foucault's ancient systems of revelatory knowledge, i.e. it is a pre-modern space of organisation that links people in society. Thomson's metropolitan symbolism is on the other side of Foucault's order of things. In Thomson's Blake poem, the overriding image is of the isolated individual, entrapped within a vacuum of self-knowledge and self-creation. The separation of the self from the communal seems to be poignantly, yet coldly, represented in the oblique, mute symbolism of humanity turned to stone:

There were thousands and thousands of human kind

In this desert of brick and stone:

But some were deaf and some were blind,

And he was there alone.

In Thomson's essay, "The Poems of William Blake", what emerges between reason and revelation is the mystical imagination. Thomson plays with humanist interpretations of

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234 "[I]t is an epic of mourning which refuses to mourn. It ends (XXI) with the massive, symbolic figure of Melancholia (based on Dürer's image), whose only 'secret' is the 'bronze sublimity' with which she repudiates metaphysical comfort, redefining Blake's male figure with the compass, as she holds the

Blake, while at the same time striving for the epiphanic moment of recognition, of spiritual communion. The essence of poetry for Thomson is a mystical absence of “a central derivative man”. Instead, there is a Pantheistic sublimation of human subjectivity, which dissolves into, and forms, a Universal History:

The essence of poetry is mysticism, and the essence of mysticism is simplicity. The two meanings in which this last word is commonly used – the one reverential, the other kindly contemptuous – are severally appropriate to the most wise and the least wise manifestations of this spirit of mysticism. It sees and is continually rapturous with seeing, everywhere correspondence, kindred, identity, not only in the things and creatures of earth, but in all things and creatures and beings of hell and earth and heaven, up to the one father (or interiorly to the one soul) of all. [...]. It is passionately and profoundly religious, contemplating and treating every subject religiously, in all its excursions and discursions issuing from the soul to return to the soul, alone, from the alone, to the alone; and thus it is by no means strict in its theology, being Swedenborgian in one man and Pantheistic in another, while in the East it has readily assimilated Buddhism and Brahminism and Mohammedism. (*Blake/Shelley*, pp.120 – 21).

This extraordinary passage on mysticism comes approximately halfway through James Thomson’s “The Poems of William Blake”. Thomson - far from being a secular rationalist – saw mysticism as the essence of Blake’s poetry. The mystical is, in Thomson’s description, the sovereign movement of the soul. The autocratic cadence of the soul is the religious principle for Thomson: “It is passionately and profoundly religious, contemplating and treating every subject religiously, in all its excursions and

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materials with which a culture builds and protects itself in her hands” (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, pp.472 – 473).

discursions issuing from the soul to return to the soul, alone. from the alone to the alone". The mystical influx of life between the individual and the universe is both metaphorically and textually at the heart of "The Poems of William Blake". The passage describing what Thomson calls "the interior of the soul" is central in the text, hedged in by other discourses. The main discourses surrounding the central image of sublime ecstasy are history, on the one hand, and materialism, on the other.

The first half of the essay is occupied with history, or how human activity enters the universal: "So the Spirit of Ages, the *Zeitgeist*, is developed universally and independently by its own mysterious laws throughout mankind; and the eminent men from whom it first radiates the expression of what we call a new aspect [...], the illustrious prototypes of an age, really cast but a faint reflex upon those beneath them". The individual is devoured by history. The moment of individual epiphany goes unnoticed and unrecognised: "While pre-eminently interesting in biography, [individual lives] are of small account in history except as prominent indices of growth and progress and decay, as early effects not efficient causes". Humanity is passive before history. Human beings are affected, not effective. Human history is an oceanic morass in which symbols of human spirit occasionally crystallise: "They help us to read clearly the advance of time; but this advance they do not cause any more than the gnomon of a sun-dial causes the procession of the hours which it indicates, or a tidal-rock the swelling of the seas whose oncoming is signalled in white foam around it and in shadowed waters over it" (*Blake/ Shelley*, p.103).

Blake's reaction to the impetus of history and the omnipotence of the transcendental is, for Thomson, a palpable expression of those lost moments of visionary rapture. The second half of *The Poems of William Blake* is concerned with tracing recognisable traits

in the “[...] relation between William Blake the Second and the principal subsequent poets”. Thomson’s essay on Blake touches the presence of the poet by recognising him in other poets. The essay follows a brief history of Romantic and post-Romantic poets, commenting on how much each retains the “simplicity” of their precursor Blake.

“Simplicity” here equates to a sovereign mysticism, a poetic action that can never be located in the moment of its happening, in its own life. Hence, “Byron had it not at all”, because his poetry is too much within life, “[...] great as the expression of intense life and of thought only as is the mere tool and weapon of life, never great as the expression of thought above and beneath life, commanding and sustaining it”. Keats, if he had not died prematurely, “[...] would have proceeded in triumphant transmigrations through all fairest forms ere it could have found eternal tranquillity in the soul of all form”. Shelley “[...] carries on the work begun by Blake, sinking its foundations into a deeper past, and uplifting its towers into a loftier future”. The poet exists alone and at the same time only achieves recognition and coherence within the historicity of a poetic community

(*Blake/Shelley*, pp.122 – 124).

Thomson cannot represent Blake’s “simplicity” without the medium of poetic history, and this history, in Thomson’s own words, must have a material presence: “The sharply cut symbol leaves a distinct and enduring impression, where abstract dogma would have perhaps made no impression at all”. Blake’s works are material symbols, a gateway through which the individual enters the universal. Language attains this status in a poet’s work when material language exacts a translation into mystical expression: “Metaphors which to the common bookwrights and journalists are mere handy counters, symbols almost as abstract and unrelated in thought to the things they represent as are the *x* and *y* and *z* used in solving algebraic problem, are for *him* burdened with rich and various freights of spiritual experience”. In an essay on Shelley, Thomson sees the



poetic as a synthesis between the material and the mystical, the individual and the universal: "It is a synthesis not arithmetical, but algebraical; that is to say, its particular subjects are universal symbols, its predicates universal laws: hence it is infinitely suggestive. It is ever-fresh wonder at the infinite mystery, ever-young faith in the eternal Soul".<sup>235</sup> Thomson sees Blake's work as a transmitter between the sovereignty of individual imagination and the universality of cultural history: "Blake has attempted what all profound poets and thinkers have ever most earnestly attempted; to seize a rude but striking image of some sovereign truth, and to stamp it with roughest vigour on the commonest metal for universal circulation" (*Blake/Shelley*, pp.117 – 118).

The unresolved tension between mysticism and materialism galvanises Thomson's work. Thomson's mystical poet must have material expression and so ends up caught in a materialist universe. The stranded poet, literally bricked up by material culture, is the image that Thomson ends "The Poems of William Blake" upon. There seems to be no negotiable discourse in Thomson's configuration of mysticism and materialism. Yet, Thomson, through Blake, does touch upon a way in which materialism can be confronted through mystical discourse. Thomson uses a lexicon of harsh physicality in describing Blake's sovereign images - *sharply cut*. But the term symbol retains a balance, almost a promise, of spiritual cognition. The structure of "The Poems of William Blake" is a symbolic creation in itself, typifying the sacred remnants inherited by secular symbolism. The quintessence of the essay is a spiritual outpouring of the individual in cosmological union with the universe. But the mystical kernel is imbedded within discourses of historical indifference and material alienation. Symbols may indicate the mystical sovereignty of the human individual, but that sovereignty remains locked inside, unrecognised. The energy of Thomson's essay is focused on the

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<sup>235</sup> James Thomson, "Shelley" in *Blake/Shelley*, p.23

imbedded moment of spiritual translucence. The secular symbols of history and materialism dissipate that energy.

## *Moncure Conway*

Moncure Conway demonstrates the plurality of both nineteenth-century *avant-garde* aesthetics and political radicalism. He is displaced, contradictory and yet completely certain in the rightness and power of communal cause. He was the son of a Southern American plantation owner who grew up to be a leading figure in the fight to abolish slavery.<sup>236</sup> He experienced intense periods of both faith and doubt. A brilliant orator, deeply committed to the abolitionist cause, he made a fateful error in approaching the Confederate envoy when they were both in London, offering terms to end both slavery and the American Civil War (d'Entremont, *Moncure Conway*, p.17). This episode, known to posterity as the Mason affair (after James Murray Mason, the Confederate envoy), illustrates the strange allegiances and conflicts of nineteenth-century art and politics: "The contrast between the sympathy shown him by artists and the abuse heaped on him by politicians seemed stark. The artists accepted him: the politicians judged him. Conway quickly convinced himself that he stood for a higher morality than even other abolitionists, who seemed now more interested in conquest than emancipation" (d'Entremont, *Moncure Conway*, p.18). Conway was also at the hub of the renaissance of South Place, a secular church in Finsbury, London, which became a focal point for intellectuals in the 1870s and 1880s under Conway's tutelage. John d'Entremont's brief précis of Conway's life sums up the contradictions of his personality perfectly: "Moncure Conway, to borrow a phrase from Walt Whitman, contained multitudes".<sup>237</sup> The Blake that Swinburne brought before the world in 1868 was in many ways ideally suited to Conway's growing cynicism with revolution based purely on a material or

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236 John d'Entremont, *Moncure Conway, 1832 - 1907: American abolitionist, spiritual architect of South Place, author of "The Life of Thomas Paine"* (The 58th Conway Memorial Lecture, December 1977, South Place Ethical Society), p.5.

237 John d'Entremont, *Southern Emancipator: Moncure Conway, the American years, 1832 - 1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.xii.

moral idiom that exchanged one type of tyranny for another. In Conway's review of Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay* for the *Fortnightly Review* (February, 1868), it is precisely the historical dialectic between mysticism and materialism that occupies the main tenet of the article:

This is the natural history of mysticism, which has scattered its seed throughout the world, - seed that has from time to time sprung up in Plotinus, Behmen, Swedenborg, Blake - and is now running to seed again in Andrew Jackson Davis, and the modern Spiritists [*sic*]. Neither the times at which the great mystics appear, nor the forms of their oracles, are accidental; the relation of these to the current age is a subject requiring far more investigation than it has yet received. As a general rule, they would seem to come at the end of sceptical generations, and to be representatives of advancing reactions against prevalent and inadequate materialism - itself a reaction against some previous inadequate mysticism. The human mind shares the general peristaltic movement of things, and like the span-worm, now lifts itself heavenward, now stretches itself along the earth. (Conway, "William Blake", p.216).

Conway's metaphor of the worm reaching heavenward and then delving into the earth recalls something of Blake's frontispiece to *The Gates of Paradise* (E259), as well as Ruskin's *The Eagle's Nest*. A common metaphor applied by the Secularists was that of looking earthward rather than towards the sky. George William Foote writes: "Religion points to the sky, common sense to the earth; religion is all imagination, common sense all reason".<sup>238</sup> The radical margins of the literary community had learnt from Ruskin, but were now moving beyond him. It has been suggested by Malcolm Hardman that

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238 George William Foote, "Christianity and Common Sense" in *Flowers of Freethought: first series* (London: The Pioneer Press, 1893), p.114.

whereas Ruskin avoids ideological conflict in order to enforce practical references, the younger Swinburne typically provokes ideological outrage, regardless of practical consequences.<sup>239</sup> Conway's summation of historical action and reaction between the material and the mystical is imbued with such a contemporary negotiation between political radicalism and spiritualism. This is illustrated by Conway's own introduction to William Blake:

It is an incident to which I have lately recurred with enhanced interest. that the first time I ever heard the name of William Blake mentioned, was on the occasion of an assemblage of the friends of Thomas Paine in a city of the Far West, to celebrate the anniversary of his birth. He was there named with honour as a faithful friend of Paine, whom he had rescued from his political pursuers; but no one in the meeting seemed to have any further association with Blake. Immediately after the disciple who made this allusion, there arose a 'spiritualist,' who proceeded to announce that the work of Paine was good, but negative; he was but the wild-honey-fed precursor of the higher religion; he prepared the way for the new revelation of Spirits. So close did Paine and Blake come to each other again, without personal recognition, in the New World, where each had projected his visions. (Conway, "William Blake". pp.216 – 17)

This anecdote illustrates the way in which the nineteenth-century reception of Blake is tied up with both radical inheritance and mystical vision. Paine is presented as the political radical, prophet of the New World of the American Republic, but whose work is "negative", devoid of spiritual vision. Blake, in contrast, is presented as *beyond* the negative materialism and secularism of the Painites. Paine is a prophet of the American

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239 I would again like to thank Malcolm Hardman for his insights into the relationship between Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites.

Republic. Blake is a prophet of what Swinburne would call the "Universal Republic". Conway is typical of the nineteenth-century reconciliation of the material and mystical poles of radicalism and dissent. He is a secular mystic, or perhaps a mystic secularist.<sup>240</sup>

The most dramatic articulation of Conway's secular-mysticism comes in *The Earthward Pilgrimage*, a reversal of Bunyan's celestial pilgrimage. *The Earthward Pilgrimage* quotes Blake's "The Tyger".<sup>241</sup> The quotation is a prelude to a chapter entitled "Isengrimm", who is "[...]the wolf in human shape whom missionaries made into a monk". Isengrimm connects the religious ritual of modern Christianity to the sacrificial barbarism of ancient religions such as Druidism and the Nordic mythology: "Neither torture nor baptism has, it seems, gone beyond the skin of him; nay, he even prowls dangerously around the cathedral doors, and snaps up an Alban now and then. The fact is, he must have his lamb and his woods. So Isengrimm calls Odin Christ, and continues to worship him; he goes to church because it is built over his long-time holy well, and is adorned with his holy oak" (*Earthward Pilgrimage*, pp.81 – 3). The historical relationship between Christianity and the "native tradition"<sup>242</sup> of ancient religion is also played out in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. In accordance with those illuminated books of Blake, Conway also makes the topography of London resonate with secular mystical significance: "Thus, in chorus, rise all noble voices. As the fires of Smithfield have made way for the Meat Market, so, after them, have the flames of God's eternal

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240 Deborah Dorfmann sees Conway in a subtly different light: "Conway, a Unitarian minister, was more secular religionist than religious secularist", *Nineteenth Century*, p.180 n.14.

241 Moncure D. Conway, *The Earthward Pilgrimage* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1870), p.80.

242 Jason Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1999), has recovered many of the aspects of this "native tradition" in Blake's writings, particularly Druidism, the religion Whittaker sees as the love-hate object of Blake's historico-religious enquiries: "[...] I am suggesting a particular means by which the Druids acquired such a peculiar, intense and personal force for Blake so that he restructured, in his art, his own past to express the domination of totemic religion. With their temples and altars, dark groves and knives, with their wicker men as vivid perversions of sacrifice of the giant, eternal self into corporeal commands against others, the Druids were the custodians and exploiters of the original sin, preserving but never making explicit the hatred infecting all loves, including those of that artist who thought himself 'perhaps the most sinful of all men!'" (p.178).

Smithfield faded out of the marts and daily life of people. There is not a man or woman in London whose practice accords with belief in the promises and threats of the Christian creed”(*Earthward Pilgrimage*, p.86). Conway does not wish “to buil[d] Jerusalem in England’s green and pleasant land” (E96), but to celebrate England as “[...] the Cemetery of Religions: Druidism, Odinism, Romanism, came from afar to find their graves here; and behold the feet of them which have buried those religions are at the door, and shall carry out also that which remains to frighten fools and make hypocrites of the able, moulding no heart to simplicity and grandeur” (*Earthward Pilgrimage*, p.87).

Conway’s hardheadedness concerning the death of religion at the end of the “Isengrimm” chapter, is atypical of those Secularists who were also Blakeans. The common-sensical approach is certainly not reflected in the writing upon Blake of the most famous “atheists” at the margins of this group, Algernon Charles Swinburne and James Thomson.

William James Linton was the first facsimilist of Blake's works, employed as the illustrator for the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake*. Linton was reproducing Blake on the brink of the great evolution in visual reproduction, photography, and on the verge of a sea-change in his own political radicalism.

If a sliding scale were to be imagined between political activity and political inertia amidst the Blake enthusiasts of the nineteenth century, Linton would definitely be at the radical end of the scale. Linton continued the tradition of preserving the life of radical inheritance. As early as 1840, he had written *The Life of Thomas Paine* and he was the first translator of Paine's *Address for the Abolition of Royalty*.<sup>243</sup> His political activities were not confined to the textual frame, and in 1839 he organised a petition for the mitigation of the death penalty passed on the Newport Rising rioters (*Radical Artisan*, p.36). He was a supporter and friend of Mazzini (*Radical Artisan*, pp.52 ff), an advocate of both English and Irish Republicanism being the "only Englishman regularly to write for the *Nation*, the organ of Young Ireland" (*Radical Artisan*, p.67). But his main political activity lay in the creation of a textual world in which radical aesthetics and politics challenged, dismantled and recreated the symbolism of received authority through iconoclastic synthesis. Linton would seem to be the spiritual inheritor of the 1790s London radicals: "To Linton, London was a moral wilderness: his method of coming to terms with it while preserving his moral fastidiousness was to make him a prophet of reform. He shared the aggression endemic in London lower-class life, but he internalised it and was later to redirect it against the monarchy and aristocracy" (*Radical Artisan*, p.8). F.B. Smith, however, has commented upon the relationship between Blake

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243 Francis Barrymore Smith, *Radical Artisan: William James Linton 1812 – 1897* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), p.33. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Radical Artisan*, followed by page number(s).



and Linton as a history of mis-recognition, of tangential visions, which never really engage.<sup>244</sup>

F.B. Smith clearly severs any line of tradition between Blake's radicalism and Linton's. This is a false economy, not giving proper critical exchange value to poetic parody and visual satire as signifiers of aesthetic admiration and political respect. It is true that Linton may have been implicated in dismissing Blake's works as "incoherent". Together with R.H. Stoddard, Linton edited a five volume edition of *English Verse*, published in 1883. Some of Blake's lyric poetry appears in the volume entitled "Chaucer to Burns". The biographical note on Blake in the appendix accentuates a split in Blake's own *oeuvre* between the lyrical simplicity of youthful inspiration and the visionary imagination of the older artist:

Blake: engraver, painter, poet; who wrote, printed, and published his poems with his own designs, his own engraving and his own colouring. Very beautiful some of these, young and simply natural, giving promise, as with Chatterton, of a rich maturity; but excess of imagination, verging on insanity, rendered his longer and later works incoherent and unintelligible. His shorter lyrics, his best, yet not always clear are in the *Songs of Innocence*, 1787, and *Songs of Experience*, 1794. *Jerusalem* and *Milton*, "written against his will," soon after 1800, was

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244 "It would be pleasant to be able to add that Linton recognised in Blake a fellow engraver, poet, patriot and visionary Londoner, a republican sprung from the people: indeed a spirit more akin to his own than any other in English history. But he disregarded Blake's rich, exhilarating wood-engravings for Thornton's *Virgil* and excluded Blake from his later *Masters of Wood-Engraving*. Blake's poetry he dismissed as 'incoherences'. But he did admire the illustrations to Blair's *Grave*, chiefly because they showed restrained white line. Linton also appears to have been totally uninterested in Blake's radicalism. He worked wholeheartedly at the Gilchrist book, but its message seems to have escaped him. His very talent blinded him to Blake's genius" (*Radical Artisan*, p.148).

[sic] the latest of his longer poetic utterances. After that he devoted himself mainly to Art.<sup>245</sup>

A few points need to be made about this passage. Firstly, it is by no means certain that Linton wrote it. Stoddard was to write a biographical appreciation of Blake in 1893.<sup>246</sup> However, Linton did write in his memoirs of a visit he paid with Alexander Gilchrist to John Linnell, in which he does describe Blake's works as "incoherences": "A strange, dry, withered old man was the painter, quaint in speech, with strange utterance of strange opinions, a man who might have admired Blake as much for his literary incoherences as for his artistic imagination".<sup>247</sup> However, the negativity directed at the poetic work is balanced by the positive emphasis upon the nature of Blake's production: "Blake: engraver, painter, poet; who wrote, printed and published his poems with his own designs, his own engraving and his own colouring. Very beautiful some of these [...]". It should not be forgotten that Linton was first and foremost an artisan poet-engraver. He brings this skill to the nineteenth-century appreciation of Blake. Linton's relationship with Blake's works is not a simple one-to-one mirror reflection of a facsimilist making an exact copy of an original. Linton achieved throughout the nineteenth century a fusion and invigoration of Blake's works within contemporary culture. G.E. Bentley was the first scholar to locate pre-Gilchrist Blake copyings by Linton, namely the "Death's Door" design" from Blair's *The Grave* in the Art-Union of London's *Thirty Pictures by Deceased British Artists* (1859, 1860) (figure 3), and John

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245 Note to the poetry of William Blake in "Chaucer to Burns" in *English Verse*, eds W.J. Linton and R.H. Stoddard (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), p.321.

246 Richard Henry Stoddard, "William Blake" in *Under the Evening Lamp* (London: Gay and Bird, 1893), pp.164 - 181.

247 W.J. Linton, *Memories* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1895), p.182.

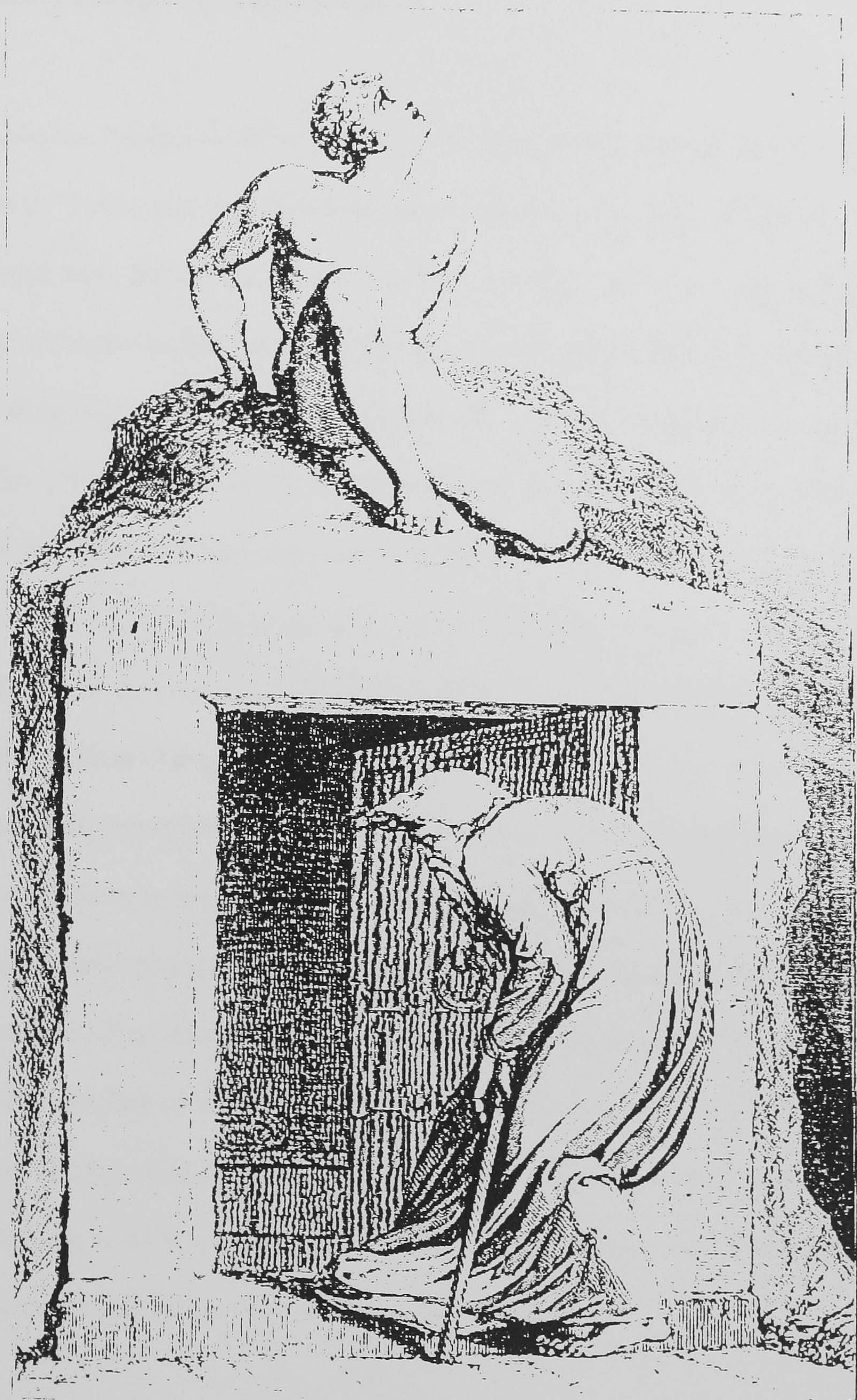


PLATE 10. THE SEATED MALE FIGURE BY W. J. FISHER AFTER WILLIAM BLAKE.  
(Gift of the Trustees of the Art Union of London.)

figure 3

Jackson's *Treatise On Wood Engraving* (1861).<sup>248</sup> Linton's interest and interaction with Blake was to grow and develop throughout the century, from careful copyist to innovative facsimilist to creative assimilist.

For Linton the "media value" of the engraved work is inherently bound up with expression: "Art is expressive, mechanism inexpressive. Lines drawn with a graver, *with design*, have art in them, of however poor a quality; lines cut without a sense of drawing, without consciousness of meaning, are only mechanical".<sup>249</sup> Linton could be paraphrasing Blake from the *Public Address*: "[...] English Engraving is Lost & I am sure [*of the*] [*the*] Result <of the comparison> will be that the Society must be of my Opinion that Engraving by Losing drawing, has Lost all character & all Expression without which <The> Art is Lost" (*PA*, p.11, E572), and "A Machine is not a Man nor a Work of Art it is destructive of Humanity & of Art" (*PA*, p.46, E575). Linton's deferral to Blake in matters of engraving is often short on words, and long on respect, lacking in any acknowledgement other than the visual homage of influence and reproduction. The reticence of Linton to compose purple passages in eulogy to Blake is often matched by the more powerful praise of Linton saying, "Look! This is Blake. I need say no more". For example, in *Practical Hints on Wood-Engraving*, Linton reproduces the crucifixion plate from Jerusalem as a frontispiece (*figure 4*) and says succinctly of Blake in a discussion of white-line engraving: "Plate II (the *Crucifixion*, a copy of a wood-cut, or metal plate engraved wood-fashion, by the hand of the poet-painter William Blake) shows exactly what 'white-line' is" (*Practical Hints*, p.43).

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248 G.E. Bentley, Jr., "'New' Blake Engravings After Blake's Designs, 1837, 1859, 1861" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 12:3 (1978 – 9), p.204.

249 W.J. Linton, *Some Practical Hints on Wood-Engraving for the Instruction of Reviewers and the Public* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1879), p.66.



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William James Linton was acutely aware of the spiritual continuum that resided in the physicality of made objects. In describing a wood-engraving known as *Apocalypsis* or *Historia Sancti Johannis Evangeliste ejusque Visionis Apocalypticae* (the story of Saint John the Evangelist and his Apocalyptic Vision), Linton evokes Blake in retrospect: “I take it to be so from its great superiority: copies are not usually better than their originals, nor does the abler artist copy the inferior. This coloured copy, coarsely and vilely coloured, has lost the Blake-like character to be seen in the earlier designs, in those of my first edition - Heinechen’s fifth”.<sup>250</sup> This glancing reference to Blake is important on two counts. Firstly, it illustrates the power and distinctness of Blake’s work for Linton’s visual imagination. Secondly, it emphasises the complex status of copy and original for the late nineteenth-century artisan engraver. D.W. Dörrebecker sees visual reproduction as being charged with a particular communicative exchange value: “During the pre-photographic centuries, printed reproductions of all sorts of pictures possessed a media value which can alone be compared to that of the similarly political consequence and authority of the word printed from moveable type”.<sup>251</sup> W.J. Linton understands the material translation of Blake’s works as an articulation of creative synthesis, reliant upon the materials and tools, the *language*, of the Artist:

If a poet is needed to translate the written verse from one tongue into another, is not he an Artist who can translate a painting into the different and less felicitous language of mere black and white? [...]. He who works in Art, artfully, artistically, is an Artist, whatever his subject, whatever his material, whatever his tools. The relative grandeur and importance of this or that branch of Art is altogether beside the question. Great as was Blake for his power as a designer,

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250 W.J. Linton, *The Master's of Wood-Engraving* (New Haven: issued to subscribers only, 1889), p.41.

251 D.W. Dörrebecker, “Innovative Reproductions: painters and engravers at the Royal Academy of Arts” in *Historicizing Blake*, pp.125 - 146 (p.127).

unrivalled as he is as a colorist, he had been not less than an Artist had he been only an engraver.<sup>252</sup>

In contrast to the simple praise expended on the fellow “hand-in-art” of William Blake, Linton almost bursts with invective against the encroaching art of photography. In reply to art-reviewers who revered the new art of photolithography, unconsciously slighting the status of the artisan engraver, Linton would match Blake in exasperated mockery:

Prodigious! He is inspired by escaping the danger of ideas, loses the aspect of his function, and so is provoked into excellence and becomes intimate with the artist. This is being elevated in a measure to the position of an interpreter, or translator of it into a new medium. It is better than the working backwards to simplicity of our friend in the *Nation*. And too funny to be treated seriously.

(*Practical Hints*, p.77)

The truth is, however, that Linton did take the threat of photography towards the artisan tradition of engraving seriously: “But the objections to the use of photography, which I have been careful to note, remain the same. The most talented engravers are hampered and crippled by it; they are confined to colour, and compelled to indefiniteness; and they waste their powers on an excess of fineness, which may find ignorant admirers, but of which they themselves are ashamed”.<sup>253</sup> As Linton continues in this vein, it becomes apparent that the integrity of the profession is one side of the coin in Linton’s argument. The other is the economic pressure exerted on an artisan tradition by new technology: “The end of this can only be imbecility in engraving, and then the substitution of some

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252 “The Engraver: his function and status” in *Scribner's Magazine* (June 1878), included in W.J. Linton, *Prose and Verse, 1836 - 1886* 30 vols, self-compiled, XIX, p.53.

253 W.J.Linton, *Wood-Engraving: a manual of instruction* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884), pp.101 - 102.

process for the mechanical weakness of the hand. For the mechanic-engraver the days of engraving are numbered. Only the artist-engraver, while he upholds the dignity, can assure the future of engraving. Beware of photography!" (*Manual of Instruction*, p.102)

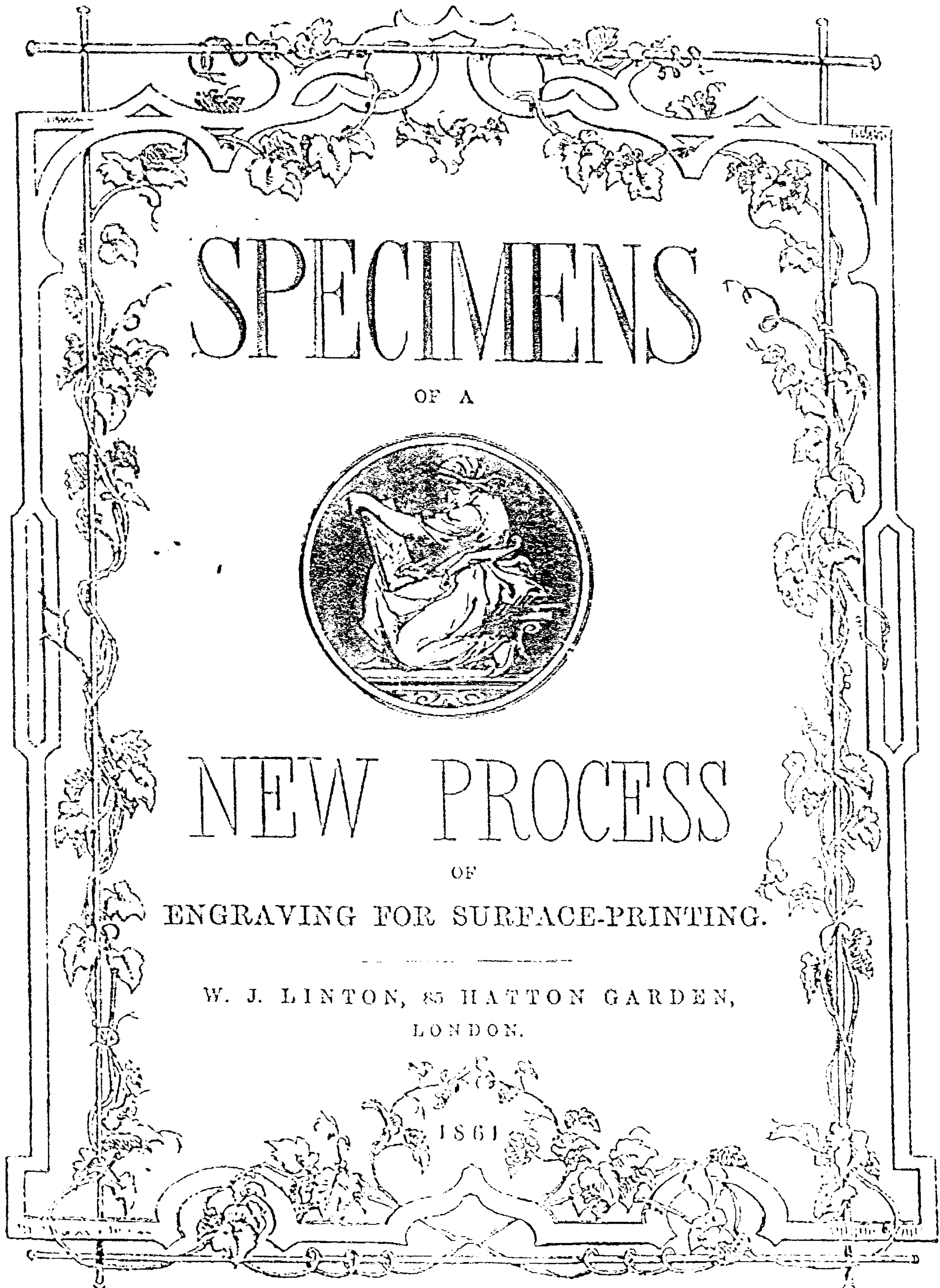
Linton's response to new reproductive technology is not, as might be supposed from his diatribe against photography, to become an anachronism. Instead he again acts as a Victorian mirror image to the life of Blake, and invents his own method of print reproduction, together "[...] with a craftsman named Hancock" (*Radical Artisan*, p.146).

In 1861, Linton produced a pamphlet promoting the "New Process of Engraving for Surface Printing"<sup>254</sup> which he called kerography (*figure 5*). In this pamphlet, Linton draws attention to the delicacy and exactness of this new process: "*An engraving by the new process is necessarily an exact facsimile, even to the minutest touch, of the draughtsman's work. Where an artist's manner is of any value, the new process, therefore is infinitely superior to engraving on wood; capable also of giving greater delicacy, and very much more minuteness and elaboration*" (*New Process*, p.5). But the greatest emphasis that Linton places upon the new process is its cheapness of production over other methods. On almost every page he underlines the low cost of kerography: "[...] costs less than wood-engraving in production, as little as wood-engraving in printing, and is even more durable" (*New Process*, p.3) and "[c]osting no more to print, and applicable in every way in which engraving on wood is applicable, the new process costs less in production. Taking the cost of drawing as the same, the cost of engraving by the new process may be calculated at only about TWO SHILLINGS FOR EVERY SQUARE INCH" (*New Process*, p.5). Kerography, however, had lost the economic and artistic battle with photographic technology by the 1880s. But the immediate battle-lines between Linton's method of facsimile reproduction and the new technology of photolithography had immediate repercussions

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254 W.J. Linton, *Specimens of a New Process of Engraving for Surface Printing* (London: no publisher detail, 1861), title-page.





# SPECIMENS

OF A



# NEW PROCESS

OF

ENGRAVING FOR SURFACE-PRINTING.

W. J. LINTON, 85 HATTON GARDEN,  
LONDON.

1861

ROBSON, LEVEY, AND FRANKLIN, GREAT NEW STREET AND FETTER LANE, E.C.

*figure 5*

in the 1860s that were of direct relevance to the mid-century publication of Blake's works in book form. In *Radical Artisan*, F.B., Smith describes the method of kerography and its use in literary production:

The process anticipated modern mechanical methods of engraving zinc or copper plates for surface printing, although Linton's technique required drawing direct on the plate. Each plate was given a black ground, then another ground in wax, on which the drawing, as in ordinary etching, was cut through to the black ground with an etcher's needle. A cast was taken from the plate to give the lines in relief and an electrotype then made from the cast to provide a printing surface. Thus for the first time it was possible to make thorough facsimile reproductions of line drawings.[...] Linton studied Blake's work very closely and used his kerographic method to make illustrations approximately to the layered colouring and printing of originals. (*Radical Artisan*, pp.146 – 7)

Given both Blake's and Linton's vituperation against the mechanisation of art, it must be the irony of ironies that Linton's kerographic reproductions of Blake's *Job* were replaced in the second volume of Gilchrist's *Life* with photolithographs. It is possible that this rejection can account for Linton's consequent hostility to photography in art and engraving. There are certainly economic factors at play. But there is also a different worldview, a difference between making and seeing the world, actively trying to alter social conditions as opposed to simply recording humanity's passing.

Linton invested Blake's works with what Roland Barthes was to call "sovereign consciousness".<sup>255</sup> What differentiates Linton's radical craft from Barthes's structuralist

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255 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p.26.

analysis of photographs is how the “sovereign consciousness” is communicated through the visual. Barthes divides visual representation into the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* is the organisation of the visual, or the cultural signification of the picture: “It is by the *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions” (*Camera Lucida*, p.26). The *studium* denotes the inner experience of the spectator in relation to the spectacle. The *punctum* literally punctuates this experience. It is what crystallises the political or historical force and narrative of the picture, and brings it into the present moment:

The second element will break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many *points* (*Camera Lucida*, pp.26 – 7)

As will be illustrated in the discussion of Linton’s use of Blake, Linton certainly uses fragments of Blake’s original designs to wound and shock the reader’s consciousness. Blake’s designs are used as the *punctum* to Linton’s poetics and politics. But there is a crucial difference between Barthes’s and Linton’s configuration of the *punctum*. For Barthes, the *punctum* is accidental. It is what rises unconsciously from the work to shatter and confront the consciousness: “This second element which will disturb the

*studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, cut, little hole - and also cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (*Camera Lucida*, p.27). There is no accidental punctuation in Linton's work. Every symbol is consciously made. Every political point is underscored by the engraver's burin. The *punctum* does not turn inwards upon the sovereign consciousness, but outwards towards the communal conscience of society. The *punctum* for Linton expresses what D.W. Dörrbecker describes as the "political consequence and authority" of printed reproduction. The political will, which transforms print media into a radical vehicle, has roots in the artisan tradition: "There is no doubt that his [Blake's] closest associations were with people who held advanced republican views. Many of his fellow engravers, such as William Sharp were of that type. Perhaps engravers were radicals precisely because of their profession: they knew that the reality of symbols and images was made, not given".<sup>256</sup> The made nature of the engraver's art is precisely what separates Barthes's and Linton's configuration of the visual *punctum*. For Barthes, it is a structural anomaly integrally tied to the photographer's art. For Linton, it is a symbolic vehicle essentially expressed through the engraver's art.

In Linton's career as an engraver and as a political commentator, we can trace a developing interest in Blake, not only as an artisan engraver, but also as a political symbolist. The "made" nature of Linton's aesthetics had an in-bred political pulse. Increasingly, this pulse was to include a rich vein of Blake's works. In his work for the Art-Union's *Treatise* or Gilchrist's *Life*, Linton was, in the main, an illustrator embroidering a project already in place. In his private and small-run publications, the aesthetic and political platform was his, and Blake's work was to make appearances in various guises, from an augury of famine to an icon of revolution. But before these semi-fantastical (but at the same time extremely serious) flights of the imagination,

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256 Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), p.158.

Linton was “to meet unwittingly” with Blake in their respective work on London. Linton’s early work, *Bob-Thin*,<sup>257</sup> covers ground common to Blake’s “London”, both in geographical location and in displaying a tapestry of social injustice. From the Gordon riots of 1780 in Blake’s London to the Chartist slogans and banners in the 1830s of Linton’s London, the metropolis maps out the socio-political consciousness of Blake and Linton. Their direct experience of metropolitan life informs their poetry and their politics, from the bloody soldiers and syphilitic infants of Blake’s “London” to the absurdist logic and brutal suffering inflicted by the Poor Laws of Linton’s *Bob-Thin*.

Blake marks out the lines of social, political and metaphysical protest in “London”:

I wander thro’ each charter’d street,  
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow.  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg’d manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sign  
Runs in blood down Palace walls

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257 W.J. Linton, *Bob-Thin or the Poorhouse Fugitive* (privately printed, 1845). Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Bob-Thin*, followed by page number(s).

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
 How the youthful Harlots curse  
 Blasts the new-born Infants tear  
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse  
 (*S of I&E* 46:1 – 24 E26 -7).

David Erdman's description of the poem is spiked with political grime and claustrophobic turmoil: "[...] we come upon infinite curses in a little room, a world at war in a grain of London soot".<sup>258</sup> Both E.P. Thompson and Erdman map out historical and political cues and clues in "London", keeping up a chain of communication with the notebook.<sup>259</sup> For example, if we take the third stanza, London is peopled by figures we know would have inhabited the streets of 1790s London, people Blake would have rubbed shoulders with in his every day life, in places that would have dominated the cityscape. The references seem transparent: the poor chimney sweeps who experienced some respite from the appalling conditions they suffered with protective regulation in 1788,<sup>260</sup> the mutinous soldiers of 1792 – 1793,<sup>261</sup> and presiding over the scene the behemoth and leviathan of church and state, the "Palace walls" and "blackening Church". However, the recapitulation of "London" in the notebook poem "An Ancient

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258 David Erdman, *Blake Prophet Against Empire*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. rev. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.275.

259 E.P.Thompson, "London" in *Interpreting Blake* ed. Michael Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) , pp.5 – 31.

260 "In 1788 philanthropists secured a piece of protective legislation for the 'climbing boys' which provided that a boy should not be apprenticed before he was eight, should be thoroughly washed once a week, and should not be compelled to go up an ignited chimney" (*Prophet Against Empire*, p.132).

261 "The latter are Blake's 'hapless Soldiers' whose 'sigh Runs in blood down Palace walls' – and whose frequently exhibited inclination in 1792 – 1793 to turn from grumbling to mutiny is not taken into account by those who interpret the blood as the soldier's own and who overlook the potentially forceful meaning of 'sigh' in eighteenth century diction. In the stucture of the poem the soldier's utterance that puts blood on palace walls is parallel to the harlot's curse that blasts and blights" (*Prophet Against Empire*, p.278). E. P Thompson comments on the literalness of the soldier's blood: "But the blood of the soldier is real, as well as apocalyptic, and so is the venereal disease that blinds the new born infant and which plagues the marriage hearse. [...] The poem makes the point very literally. Blake was often a very literal-minded man" (*Interpreting Blake*, "London", p. 18).

Proverb` transmutes Blake`s descriptive narrative into a prescriptive message, a recipe for republican action:

Remove away that blackning church

Remove away that marriage hearse

Remove away that —— of blood

You`ll quite remove the ancient curse<sup>262</sup>

(E475)

But the assassin`s knife is necessarily blunted in the Blake`s published poetry. The engraved version of “London” in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is a mind-locked work. The political aetiology of the poem is withdrawn into a mindscape of personal reflection. The “mind-forg`d manacles” are heavy links in the internal propagation of oppressive dogma. Human voices crowd into the mental reservoir, with no point of reference other than their own Kantian configurations, the self-strangling “mind-forg`d manacles”. However, E.P. Thompson has read the poem as a progression from objective spectator to subjective participant, as a breaking out of mental self-reflection and immersion into human society (*Interpreting Blake*, “London”, p.18). In the draft of the poem, the deleted line reads “german forged links”(Et796), referring to George the III, and the House of Hanover.<sup>263</sup> The message is clear. The citizens of London are repressed by monarchy. There is an object at which to direct anger and a political course of action in which to enact social reform.

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262 Erdman sees this poem as a recapitulation of “London” “[...] in the form of a Bastille Day recipe for freeing Old England from further plagues” (*Prophet Against Empire*, p. 279).

263 “A rejected reading, ‘german forged links,’ points to several manacles forged ostensibly in the mind of Hanoverian George: the Prussian maneuvers on the heath, the British alliance with Prussia and Austria

HOW THIN.



own souls of this most hostly sod,  
 This dreary swamp, by Landlord's dogged,  
 Whose legs nobody faint or fagged,  
 No charity might e'er in  
 To save the heaver's amercing  
 Even in this piece of misery  
 And Bob at his prosperity,  
 In a great heart and "two to one of" low  
 Fancifully, unaccountably, bold,  
 Means, unscrupulously as the sun  
 Of London's Court Court; yet Bob upon  
 From north till "dewy eve," was an  
 Case (don't you see, a terrible),  
 Who has been that characterly, fact's,  
 And took, and that lived in the lee  
 Of a far beautiful one use,  
 But Bob's was no uncommon case,  
 He faced the others of his race,  
 In the working Parish east, who took ye  
 London for "charities" renowned,  
 Despite the daily tricks found  
 Of heavy Squads' crippled foot  
 "Carry Lambeth and Fenchurch-street,  
 (And other roads in London's street,  
 And their officers, in gaiters, Queen  
 I thought not with her lustre face  
 The same one, change of the place,  
 Though on "high ground," it is said,  
 For see you, Andrograph's lions tall,  
 And all the Ministry's sweet features,  
 From the interesting creatures,  
 Yet, Bob's, would it not be possible  
 To face the hungry poor who wait in  
 Through all weather, muddy and bare,  
 To and from her feet that not want  
 Of your "graced" postage rate,  
 With about seven Pound's monthly,  
 Won't you tell me that your "Court's" bounds  
 The very dirtiest and "lazzard" bounds  
 "Good Court." The "Court" had deep by heart,  
 What? "Paradise" introduced at Court?

figure 6



figure 7



The undefined yet chartered streets of Blake's "London" are mapped out by "mind-forg'd manacles". In *Bob-Thin* there is the literal tracing of named streets in "London" by the figurative Squalor. Linton's and Blake's poems correspond to each other. Blake's "London" is manifested in metaphysical definition, the very streets configured by imagination ensnared. Linton's poem is politically defined, almost to the point of satire. Yet both "London" and *Bob-Thin* create a symbolic context that is recognisably the same. They are almost inversions of each other. Symbolic inversions in which the general in one is the particular in the other; the metaphysical aporia in one becomes the political definition of the other and vice versa.

The translocation of political, social and metaphysical discourse can be seen in the illustrations that accompany "London" and *Bob-Thin*. Blake's "London" is a literal scene in which a child leads an old, crippled man. Geoffrey Keynes describes the connotations of this scene, in relation to Blake's own symbolic mythology, thus: "In the illustration a child leads an old man on crutches through the streets. This bearded figure may be the creator, Urizen, himself crippled by the conditions he has created".<sup>264</sup> In retrospect, the figure is also reminiscent of Linton's "Hoary Squalor's crippled feet". Thomas Sibson engraved the illustrations to *Bob-Thin*. Brian Maidment describes them as "[...]powerful engraved woodblock capital letters which supply a running commentary to the text using the graphic idiom of Seymour and Cruikshank – a collaboration which may have been the outcome of a jointly projected radical history of England which Linton and Sibson had planned in 1842 or 1843".<sup>265</sup> Sibson's illustrations to the above quoted passages of *Bob-Thin* are metaphorical rather than

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264 Geoffrey Keynes, from the commentary to "London" in William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.151.

265 Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives: self-taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987), p.73.

literal, the human cogs and wheels that are the engraved capitals of the *Bob-Thin* verses recalling Blake's metaphysics of the mind in *Milton*:

This Wine-press is call'd War on Earth, it is the Printing-Press  
Of Los; and here he lays his words in order above the mortal brain  
As cogs are formd in a wheel to turn the cogs of the adverse wheel.  
(*M* 27[29]: 8 – 10, E124)

Blake creates a metaphor for the inner experience of humanity, alienated and isolated from community, spinning in the orbit of their own abstraction. Los's words challenge the self-absorbed social entropy of this process. The Printing-Press is the harbinger of social revolution in *Milton*. It creates words which act as cogs "[...] formd in a wheel to turn the cogs of the adverse wheel", causing a literal and metaphorical, textual and social, revolution in the minds of humans. Linton and Sibson take Blake's metaphor and apply it to the page of the text, printing visual representations of the social and metaphysical enslavement of humanity. The affinity to Blake in matters of social commentary, political will, artistic interpretation and integration of text and design is clear at this early stage. In Linton's later, post-Gilchrist poetry, it is evident that he was actively assimilating Blake's influence into his own work.

Linton's poetry in *Ireland for the Irish*<sup>266</sup> retains some of the allegorical playfulness of *Bob-Thin*, but the allegory itself is undercut by the social reality of specified individuals suffering in the abstract processes of economic hierarchy, as in "The Contrast":

"Labour's children, fever-murder'd, on a dung-heap lie;/ Labour may be coffin'd in the

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266 W.J. Linton, *Ireland for the Irish: rhymes and reasons against landlordism, with a preface on fenianism and republicanism* (New York: The American News Company, 1867). Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Ireland*, followed by page number(s).

poor-house by and bye" (*Ireland*, p.44). Linton is at great pains to inform us that the fever-murdered children lying on the dung heap are a social reality, an actual event, and not simply an image drawn by poetic licence. The symbolic has become aligned to a lyrical drama of voice, in which what is symbolic of a general social condition is expressed through individual voices:

"Father! Mother! wake from sleeping!"

Ever hoarser with their weeping: -

They will wake no more

He is dead, and she death-nearing;

And those little ones despairing -

Father! save thy Poor

(*Ireland*, p.45)

Although there are points in which the craft of this poem almost sinks beneath the weight of sentimentality, the controlled ambiguity of voice is reminiscent of Blake's most skilful lyricism in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The swinging pendulum of objectivity and subjectivity reaches an apex of expression in the typographical sleight of hand that omits the quotation marks in the final stanza. The subjective voice of the children becomes the objective prayer, tinged by the irony of religious hypocrisy, of an impotent society - "Father! save thy Poor". Blake uses almost exactly the same ploy in "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Songs of Innocence*, where the total omission of quotation marks makes the closure of "The Chimney Sweeper's" narration highly ambiguous and highly charged: "So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm" (*S of I&E* 12:24, E10). This is not simply the subjective voice of the naive sweep, who has internalised religious ideology and dutifully murmurs the dogmas of deferred reward. It is a direct

plea from the poet for the audience to do their social duty so that they, the sweeps, need not fear their present life.

The 1870s saw a consolidation of Blake's on-going influence upon Linton. During the 1870s, Linton produced *Broadway Ballads* and *Famine*, both of which contain work inspired by Blake. During this period Linton was trying to work through the relationship of communitarianism and individualism, the state and the republic. Following the fall of the Paris Commune, the fine balance of liberty obtained by violent sacrifice seemed not to produce the dreamed-of universal republic. Instead the sovereignty of the individual was translated into a politics of sovereign states. Individual republics and human individuals stood alone and were crushed mercilessly by the physical force of the state, and the ideological force of a reactionary and conservative media:

The Commune is a failure. The men who attempted it are condemned. The great humanitarian question set by those "Communists", the question of the abolition of misery through the organization of labor, is not to be solved that way. Is the Reaction therefore sure? This wager of battle has given no verdict for or against the issue. It says no more than this: Not by a single city, nor by a separate nation, shall that remodelling of society be accomplished through which the hire of the laborer shall no longer be kept back by fraud. The weakness of the Paris Commune lay in its isolation. Yet all that Blood has not been poured out in vain. One gain cannot escape us. While we note mistaken policy, let us not the less take this to heart: that once again these men of Paris have given to the world the ever-needed example of heroic daring and devotedness, have laid one more

broad stone (though it be their own grave-stone) of that glorious causeway over which Humanity, defeated or triumphant, marches firmly to the Republic.<sup>267</sup>

It is at this point, in the retrospect of failed revolution and the blood of torn hopes, that the political radicalism of “mystical Blake” re-asserts its presence in the transmission of the Blakean works. Linton re-writes the Republic through Blake. *Broadway Ballads*, written to commemorate the centenary of the American Republic under Linton’s pseudonym, Abel Reid, is a work that from the first pages seems to be touched by the spirit of Blake. The opening poem, “Of the Ballad Singer”, shares the social critique of the metropolis that we see in *Bob-Thin*, but the cityscape now resounds with a pseudo-mystical voice:

Till the pity in his bosom  
Surged up in a wrathful flame;  
And he flung out words like firebrands,  
Cursing those who wrong’d.<sup>268</sup>

There are points in the introductory poem where the ballad singer in the city is extremely reminiscent of James Thomson’s poem in remembrance of Blake at the end of “The Poems of William Blake”. Thomson’s poem describes the isolated figure wandering through London’s streets:

He came to the desert of London town,

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267 W.J. Linton, *The Paris Commune: in answer to the calumnies of the New York Tribune* (Boston: reprinted from *The Radical* for September 1871), p.26.

268 Abel Reid (pseud. W.J. Linton), *Broadway Ballads: collected for the centennial commemoration of the Republic* (author's edition, 1876), p.6. Bound into William James Linton, *Poems and Translations*

Grey miles long;

He wandered up and he wandered down.

Singing a quiet song.

(*Blake/Shelley*, p.128)

Linton's poem starts like this:

Came a Stranger to that City:

Say the City was New York:

There were merchant princes in it;

There were workmen, out of work

And continues:

And that Stranger through the City

To and fro went, day and night,

Seeing all was done within it,

Openly, in the common sight

(*Broadway*, p.5)

The influence of Blake becomes stronger as the volume progresses. The vulgar satire, *The Maid of Broadway*, is prefaced by one of Blake's notebook poems, taken from the Rossetti manuscript. Linton transcribes the poem thus:

When a man marries a wife

He finds out whether  
Her elbows and knees  
Are glued together  
(*Broadway* ,p.26)

As far as I am aware this is the first publication of this poem. The transcription is not quite true to the original as transcribed by Erdman:

When a Man has Married a Wife  
he finds out whether  
Her Knees & elbows are only  
glued together  
(E516)

The changes could be Linton carrying out a Dante Gabriel Rossetti type “shaking up”<sup>269</sup> of Blake’s rhymes. Or it could be that Linton, who had access to the Rossetti manuscript for the *Life of Blake*, is remembering Blake’s epigram, capturing the core, if not the exact form.

However, it is the relation of Blake to the secular self, the isolated individual separated from both “God and the people”,<sup>270</sup> that really comes to the fore in *Broadway Ballads*.

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number(s).

269 Letter to Anne Gilchrist, July 1861 (*Anne Gilchrist*, p.94).

270 Ruskin found this motto on the walls of Brantwood, the Lake District home he brought from Linton, which had housed Linton’s radical press. John S. Deardon, “Printing at Brantwood: I. Linton, *The Republic* and *The Tribune*” in *The Book Collector* 27:4 (1978), pp.515 – 32, (p.531), quotes Ruskin’s letter to John Severn (14<sup>th</sup> September 1871): “... There certainly *is* a special fate in my getting this house – The man from whom I buy it – Linton – wanted to found a ‘republic’ - Printed a certain number of ‘the Republic’ – like my Fors Clavigera! and his printing press is still in one of the outhouses – and ‘God and the People’ scratched deep in the whitewash outside. Well – it won’t be a republican ‘centre’ now – but whether the landed men round will like my Toryism better than his Republicanism, remains to be seen”..

The wound of the Paris commune had not yet closed for Linton, but the pain had turned into a reflective energy that produces what I consider one of Linton's finest poetic moments. I am quoting from "From A Lamp Iron":

I may add only this, which does not wrench  
The gist of his own words, here writ, in French.  
He fought in Paris for the Commune, fled  
*Only when Hope was slain with Delescluze:*  
In exile had not where to lay his head -  
Vagabond - Christ-like. They could not refuse  
*A grave when he was dead*  
(*Broadway*, p.89)

This is a poem where the Linton sentimentality is truly reborn as *pathos*, the judgement of each line holding the narrative of the poem in suspense, and thus painfully, slowly and without undue exclamation, teasing out the threads of tense alienation. It is the dialogue between the present and the absent, the speaking and the silent, which is the true beauty of the poem. This poem seems to be the living embodiment of the dialogic. The moment of crossing subjectivities is at its most poignant in the translation of the note, the use of the third person holding the narrator in the dialogue but the listener distant still, a distance emphasised in the cold reality of the end lines: "[...] They could not refuse/ A grave when he was dead".

At one point in "From A Lamp Iron", there is a wonderful homage-parody of the ironically fitting "Proverbs of Hell" from the end of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

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Reardon notes that during restoration work the motto was found in large black letters under layers of whitewash on the *interior* north wall.



The exclamatory “Enough! or Too much” (*MHH* 10:70, E38) becomes the conversational “Not quite/ Enough this: yet too much!” (*Broadway*, p.88 – 9). This is not the playful parody of “The Tyger!” that Linton executes in *Heliconundrums*.<sup>271</sup> The Blakean refrain in “From A Lamp Iron” carries a far heavier dramatic and ideological weight. Is the fate of the Communist, escaped from slaughter in the Paris gutter, inevitably death by indifference in the brave new world of Capitalist America, the “economic Republic” of the freemarket? Has Republicanism in effect died a death? The poem “Our New Decalogue” is a biting satirical indictment of Republican idealism fallen into material self-interest. The Ten Commandments are rewritten in the language of capitalism:

And do no murder! Never, never stain  
 Thy palms with blood: the open hand of Cain  
 Is awkward save in war-time. Thou may’st take  
 The means of life, not life; and daily sell  
 The innocent blood for silver, or for gold.  
 (*Broadway*, p.108 – 9)

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271 Spider! Spider! hid from sight  
 Til some hapless fly alight,  
 What fore-thoughtful brain and eye  
 Fashion’d thy web’s nice symmetry.

W.J. Linton, “To a Spider” in *Heliconundrums* (one of twenty five copies printed privately at the Appledore Press, author’s copy, autographed “W.J. Linton 1892”), pp.61 - 62. Anne Janowitz sees a celebration of minute volition rather than tyrannical force : “[...] ‘To a Spider’ shifts Blake’s perspective from the macro- to the micro – cosmic: ‘In what distant deeps of skies/ Grew those rare geometries?’ and acknowledges the sublimity of tininess as well as power” (*Lyric and Labour*, p.199). It is the *isolation* of the tyger that Linton protests against in “To a Spider”. Linton’s parody takes to task those who choose to see the tyger in isolation, as the devastating work of an omnipotent and individual creator. In this sense Linton returns to the original poem and “[...] the symbiotic relationship between the dreaded creator and the dreadful creature [...] contrasted, complemented, controlled by the smug pussycat of the design”, G.E. Bentley, “Blake’s Works as Performances: intentions and inattentions” in *Text: transactions of the society for textual scholarship* 4 (1988), pp.319 – 341 (p.319). Linton returns the tyger to the normality of everyday creation, lived in symbiosis with the rest of society.

Following the poem's ending - "And rounding thus thy perfectness of life,/ Since thou can'st not take with thee of thy hoard,/ Naked depart, to meet thy sure reward!/ Amen!" (*Broadway*, p.109) - is a tailpiece reworking the falling king and serpent figure from the bottom of plate 5 of Blake's *America* (*figure 8* and *figure 9*). The vortical symmetry of the Blakean serpent's coils becomes the distended contortions of the Linton serpent. The age of revolutionary order has passed into an age of evolution internalised. Linton has to acknowledge the problems facing the secular self, and the political effect of social alienation. In contrast to Blake's serpent, the torsions of Linton's serpent seem to be in a state of resistance to its very isolation, pointing to the opposite page where the engraved heading, hewn in daggers into a rock-face announces "God is not dead".

As this desperate pointing outwards to God suggests, Linton's Republicanism is tinged by a certain fatalism. This "fatalism" is evident in Linton's re-inscribing of the visual harbingers of Blake's apocalypse in *Europe*. The titlepage of *Famine: a masque*<sup>272</sup> is a synthesis of conventional typographic reproduction (Linton's masque, *Famine*) and the design for plate 9 of Blake's *Europe* (*figure 10* and *figure 11*). This synthesis forms one of the most spectacular examples of radical textual transmission in the history of Blake in the nineteenth century. Smith suggests that the beauty of the figures, together with Linton's apocalyptic verse, points towards Linton's interest in the fragile and fatal balance of a Lamennaisian universe.<sup>273</sup> The graphics and the text are suitably apocalyptic:

Across the huddled clouds where Famine standeth

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272 F.B. Smith dates this work at c. 1875. It is bound into the same volume as *Broadway Ballads* entitled *Poems and Translations 1875 – 1892*. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Famine*, followed by page number(s).

273 "The beauty of the figures and the juxtaposition of vitality and blight, together with Linton's own declamatory verse on the evil of hunger, remind us forcibly of his lifelong preoccupation with Lammenaisian physical and spiritual perfection and his concern with the existence of evil and the fragility of good" (*Radical Artisan*, p.196).



figure 8



figure 9

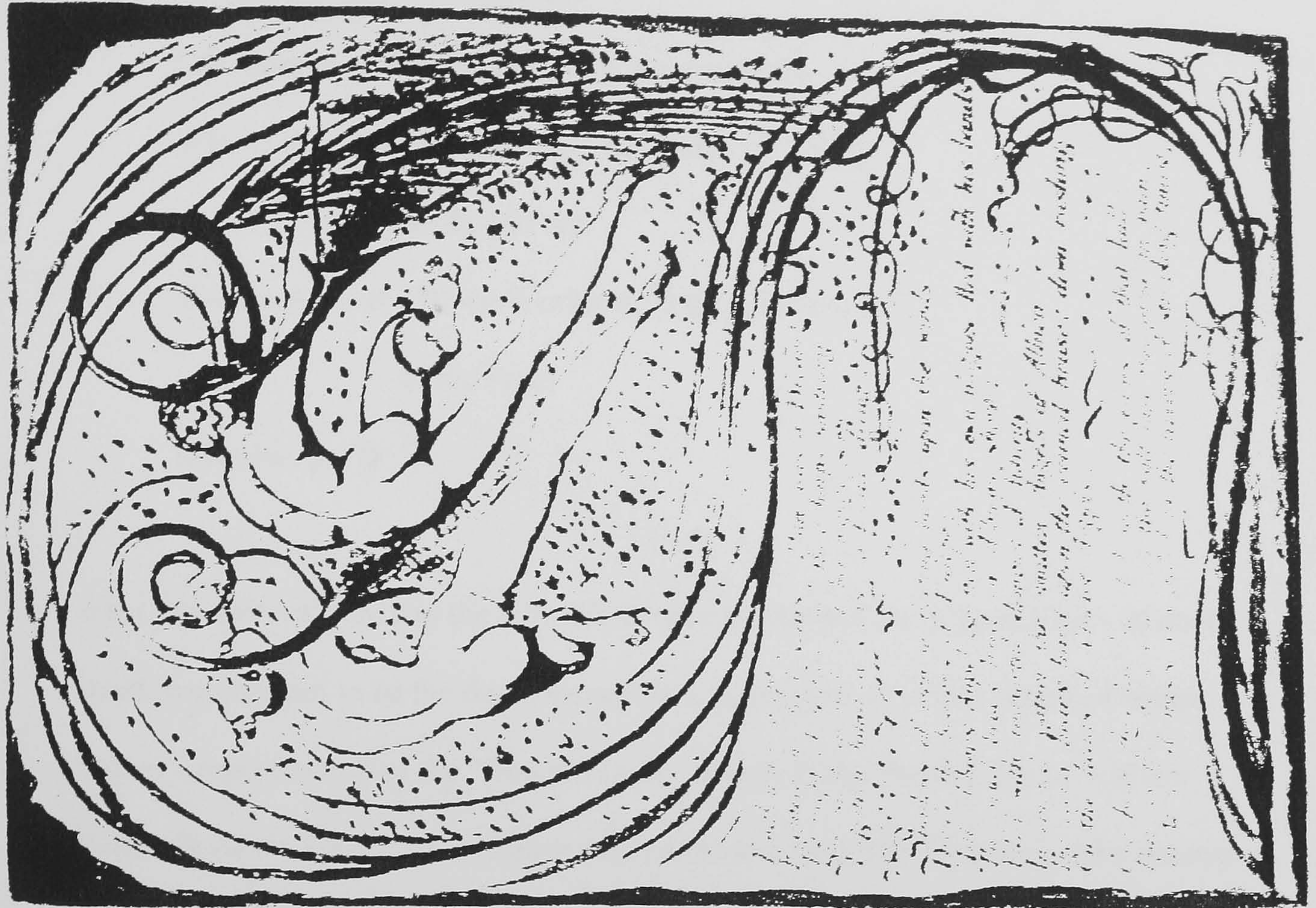


figure 11

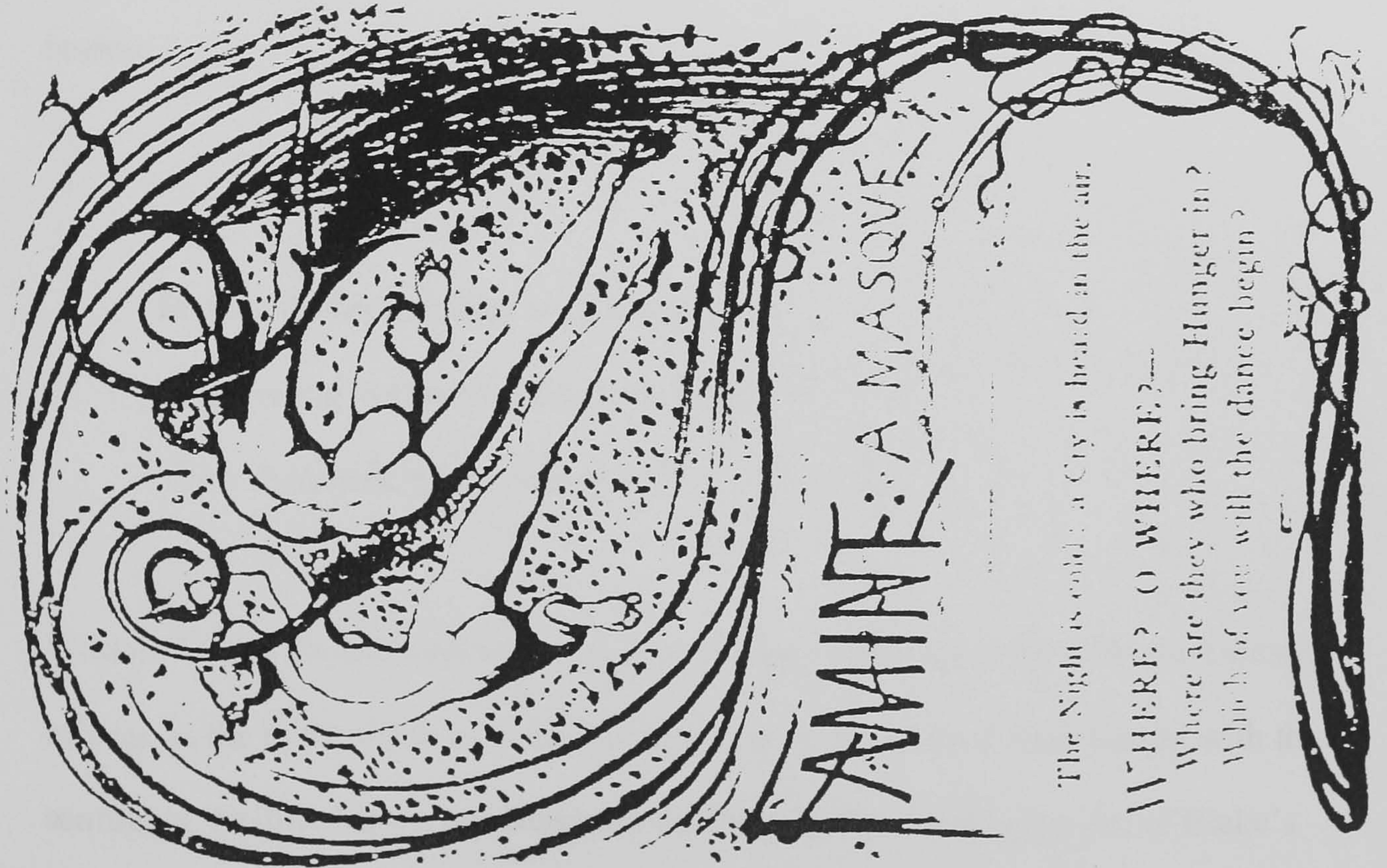


figure 10

See the Rainbow in its double splendour!  
The Storm's sign of surrender  
Unto him who Gloom and Light commandeth.  
Who is it that demandeth sight beyond?  
So! - Look thou forth, and see  
The Doom of the Risen Workman in the wide realms  
of the Free!

(*Famine*, p.17)

What possible volition can the individual have against such arraigned forces of doom? Death would seem to be the door opened by a malevolent God or a detached nature. Linton's reproduction of the "Death's Door" design as the frontispiece to William Cullen Bryant's *Thanatopsis* (figure 12), seems to reflect this final fate of the believer and the atheist alike. The poem opens with a soporific communion with nature, where beauty:

[...] glides

Into his darker musings, with a mild  
And healing sympathy, that steals away  
Their sharpness, ere he is aware.<sup>274</sup>

William Cullen Bryant's poem seems not to be so much concerned with consciousness raising, as the hypnotising of consciousness. But we should not align Linton with this sentiment. Neither Linton nor Blake would abide by this, despite the use of Blake's works by Linton in contexts that suggest human fragility and loss. The very presence of

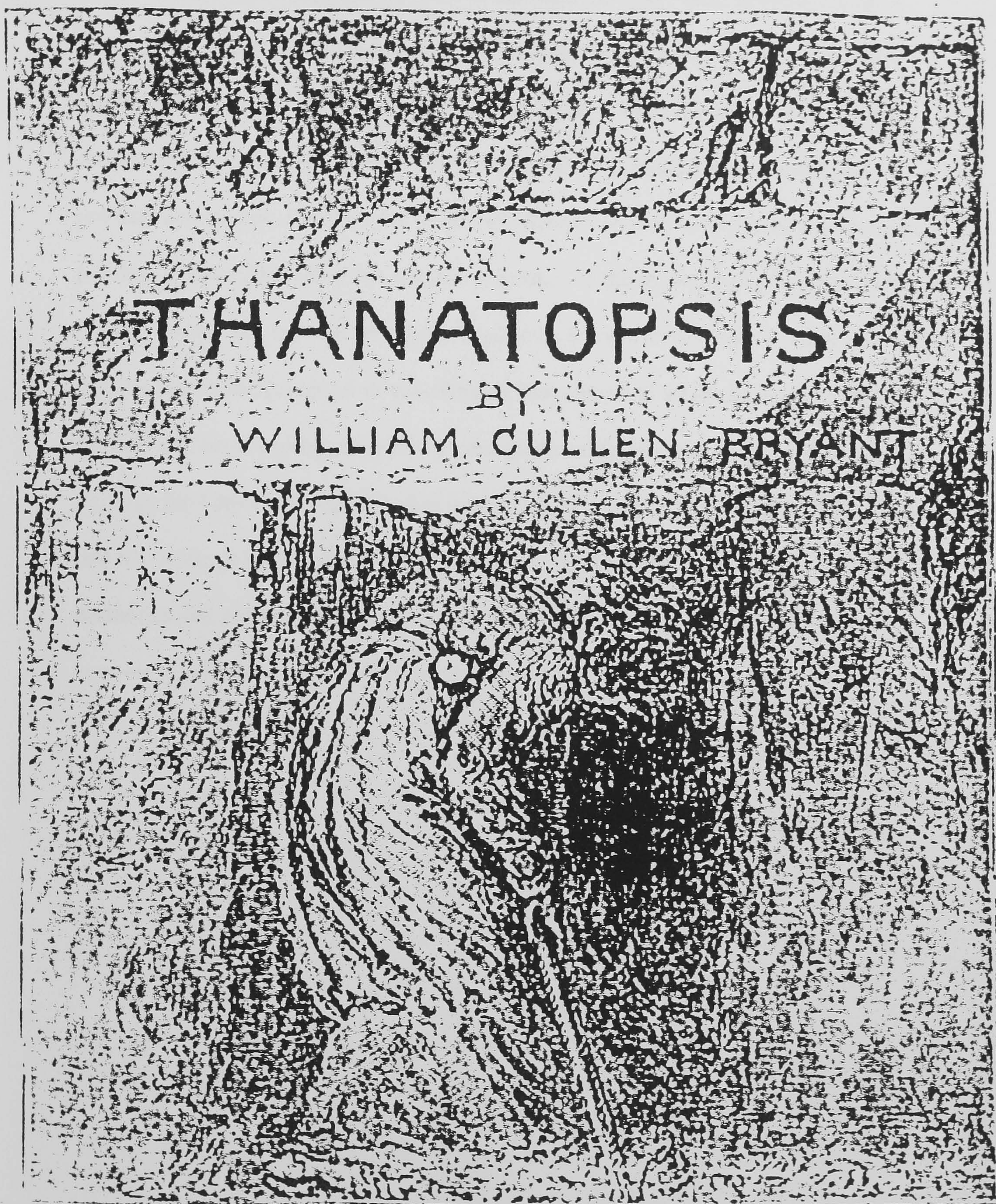
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274 William Cullen Bryant, *Thanatopsis* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1882), p.1.

# THANATOPSIS

BY

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, NEW YORK.

*figure 12*

Blake's visual art in such innovative and unexpected settings is a silent testimony to artisan volition and the political power of the made (and re-made) symbol. Linton's "Blakes" are not dead but resurrected. They are the "choir invisible" of the secular-mystic. Blake and Linton take the metaphysical and ontological angst of death and produce symbols of a new world. They turn religious apocalypse into social and political apocalypse. Linton's use of Blake's designs in his work creates a continuum of political symbolism, which has specific meaning for the secular politics of the 1870s. In Linton's work, the material presence of the book recognises the indivisibility of art from politics. The bibliographical re-encoding of Blake's visual art in the pages of *Broadway Ballads* is Linton's recognition of the continuum of Republican art and the possibility (still) of the Universal Republic. But more than this, Linton's relationship with Blake and his works is an important, but marginalised, aspect of the cultural exchange between aesthetics and politics, slip sliding away from the hegemony of Victorian dogma.

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*Joseph Skipsey*

Joseph Skipsey is at the opposite end of the politico-aesthetic sliding scale when compared to William James Linton. Whereas Linton works outwards, emblazoning Blake's designs into the political consciousness of his own poetic works from the 1860s onwards, Skipsey turns inwards, away from the overtly political arena. Linton takes Blake out into the world, trumpeting the prophetic relevance of Blake for the socio-political world of the late nineteenth century. Skipsey turns inwards, returning to the metaphysical relevance of Blake's works.

For both Linton and Skipsey, the poet is the prophet. For Linton, that means political communion. For Skipsey, it is a question of metaphysical correspondence: "[...] for it is in the nature of things that the seer may see further than he thinks; that the singer may sing more than he knows; that in short, the poet's work may awaken and arouse the mind of the reader to the perception of a star-like galaxy".<sup>275</sup> The difference between the overtly political symbolism that Linton deploys in his use of Blake's works, and the cynosures of sublime communion that drew Skipsey to Blake's works, may be partially explained by different mediums of expression. Linton was a visual artist, a professional artisan earning his living by hewing images from unyielding material. The austere materiality and raw power of salient symbolism were constantly before Linton. Skipsey was a working class poet, expressing his individual vision not in the one-to-one basis of artisan and artefact, but against the brute beauty of the Northumbrian coalfield ballads. For Skipsey, solitary vision and aggregated voice are entwined in the being of the poet:

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<sup>275</sup> "Prefatory Notice" (*Canterbury Blake*, p.32).



The poet, then, besides being a seer, is a singer also, and being once possessed with the beauty of the idea – of the vision he sees – he sings – for has not “the magic clarity of his vision made Execution the fiery chariot of his genius.” as it did to that of Blake? – to such purpose he sings, that his song, so weird and so deep, yet so simple and so sweet “holdeth children from their play, and draweth old men from the chimney corners,” and so continues to exercise its spell till the world, unconscious as it may be from whence the divine ichor proceeded, has drunk it in at every pore, and so at last has become impregnated with the beauty in truth, and the truth in beauty, of what he doth sing.<sup>276</sup>

Skipsey evokes an inner world of poetic experience, which he invites us to enter. In a letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Skipsey describes Dante Alighieri’s works as “[...] symbols of psychic states and truths, whether the Seer himself so understood them or not”. Skipsey goes on to say “I believe Blake entertained a similar opinion”.<sup>277</sup> Skipsey is on the border between mystical and psychological discourse in his interpretation of Blake. Walter Ong writes of the oral tradition that formed Skipsey’s consciousness as a poet in the terms of an amplification of the inner self:

We are more accurate if we keep our metaphors closer to the world of sound and think of speech and of works of literature as “amplifications” or, better, as intensifications of an interior. All words projected from a speaker remain, as has been seen, somehow interior to him, being an invitation to another person.

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276 Joseph Skipsey. “The Singer and the Seer” in *Igdrasil: journal of the Ruskin reading guild* 1 (1890), pp.69 – 76, 136 – 141, and 182 - 189 (p.141).

277 Joseph Skipsey to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, October 26th 1878. In the Rossetti Family Collection, British Columbia University. Photocopies of the collection are located in the Bodleian Library.

another interior, to share the speaker's interior, an invitation to enter in, not to regard from the outside.<sup>278</sup>

From this perspective, Skipsey is no longer a lone voice singing in the wilderness, but a lost spokesperson for a disenfranchised generation of workers and their tradition.

Skipsey is both an unique voice and a voice of a community. He is peculiarly like Blake in being the object of aesthetic prejudice in his own time and almost forgotten in ours.

In the year (1862) that Skipsey wrote his most famous and most powerful lyric on the death of two hundred and fifteen men and boys in the Hartley Coal Pit,<sup>279</sup> Stéphane

Mallarmé was proclaiming to his fellow Symbolists: "Make sure that if there is vulgarization it is of morality, not art, and your efforts do not tend toward making you,

as I trust they have not, that grotesque and pitiful thing, *a working-class poet*".<sup>280</sup> In

opposition to such aesthetic elitism, Leo Tolstoy was to write in "Symbolists and Decadents": "People say: Works of art do not please the people because the people are

unable to understand them. But if a work of art has as its aim to affect people with the feeling which the artist experienced, how can we speak of not understanding?"<sup>281</sup> Where

do we find Skipsey and Skipsey's interpretation of Blake in between these two

positions, one drawing a closed, esoteric circle around the creativity of the individual

and the other positing the necessity of the social relevance of art? We find Skipsey

exactly there - in between. The "states of psychic symbolism" that Skipsey describes

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278 Walter Ong, "A Dialectic of Oral and Aural Correlatives" in *20th Century Literary Criticism: a reader*, ed. David Lodge (Harlow: Longmans, 1972), pp.498 - 508 (p.503).

279 Joseph Skipsey, "The Hartley Calamity" in *Miscellaneous Lyrics* (London: Bedlington, 1878), pp.114 - 119.

280 Stéphane Mallarmé, "Art for All" reprinted in *Realism, Naturalism and Symbolism: modes of thought and expression in Europe, 1848-1914*, ed. Roland Stromberg (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp.200 -202 (p.202).

281 Leo Tolstoy, "Symbolists and Decadents" from *What is Art?* (1897), reprinted in *Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism*, p.208 - 219 (p.219). Stromberg provides this footnote (p.208): "*What is Art?* was first published in 1897. Henry Altemus published the following translation by Charles Johnson,

and explores in his introductory sketch of Blake mingles with metaphors drawn from the working reality of the pit-poet:

[...]Mr. Swinburne appears to be able to penetrate and to bring to light the most precious jewels of meaning from passages in those books, which otherwise are, to my weaker sight, as dark as a coal-pit whose intense gloom is unilluminated even by the dim light of the Davy lamp. Passages in even the most mystical, so far as my reading of them goes, however, are noted for real poetical beauty, and *TheL* is full of tenderness, sweetness, and delicacy throughout. Indeed, this is a real and genuine poem, and I say this without presuming to be able to decipher in clear terms the author's drift, for I do not regard that particular ability altogether essential before such a verdict is given, so long as the product possesses to me a meaning - an undefinable one though it may be - or constitutes spells by which visions of beauty and delight may be conjured up in my imagination, and visions of which the poet himself may never have dreamed[.]<sup>282</sup>

The extended metaphor that Skipsey applies to Blake's poetry and the interpretation of that poetry is one of the most magnificent, moving descriptions in nineteenth-century literary criticism: Blake's poetry, as intense and impenetrable as a coal pit "unilluminated even by the dim light of the Davy lamp", coupled with Swinburne's criticism bringing "to light the most precious jewels of meaning". The force of this description is unaffectedly touching coming from a man who had learnt to read in the darkness of the

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which had been amended by the editor, in Philadelphia, in 1898. It is available in other translations, including a Library of Liberal Arts paperback".

282 "Prefatory Notice", *Canterbury Blake*, pp.31 - 32.

pit.<sup>283</sup> At the same time, Skipsey's poetry and criticism is not simply dealing in the raw currency of emotional experience. The experience of working in the coalfields is not described in realistic detail, but evoked in symbolic language, working by ellipsis and suggestion. In one sense, this is simply aesthetic preference at work. But on another level, poetics is politics, particularly in the tradition of orality and literacy that is so much part of Joseph Skipsey's experience:

The highly interiorized stages of consciousness in which the individual is not so immersed unconsciously in communal structures are stages which, it appears, consciousness would never reach without writing. The interaction between the orality that all human beings are born into and the technology of writing, which no one is born into, touches the depths of the psyche.[...] Writing introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more conscious interactions between persons. Writing is consciousness-raising.<sup>284</sup>

If writing can be seen as consciousness raising through the individuated form of the written or printed word, then interpretation and editing is the process of reanimating a poet's consciousness in a different cultural and/or historical context. A model emerges in the Blake renaissance of poetic correspondence and political purpose. Skipsey and Linton are polarised in this model. Joseph Skipsey's experience and internalisation of questions endemic to lower class life in the pits of Northumbria did not result in the sort of direct political activity that was to mark out Linton's career. Instead, Skipsey may be

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283 "Joseph went to work in the mines at the early age of seven years. He was a trapper-boy when he taught himself to write in the darkness of the mine, or by the aid of a piece of candle, which he stuck against the wall with a lump of clay", from "Joseph Skipsey" [obituary] in *The Country Monthly* 3 (1903), p.728.

284 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the technologizing of the word* (London: Routledge, 1982), pp.178 - 179.

found at the other end of the scale, politically inactive. This does not mean to say, however, that Skipsey was depolitized or had no political awareness. Only his way of expressing and symbolising the socio-political world is always concerned with the internal, rather than the external, conflict:

Thus shalt thou in the Universe external,  
The Universe internal read, and so  
Possess what shall be to the weal eternal  
Of earth`s benighted `habitants to know.<sup>285</sup>

Skipsey is not so much politically agnostic as a political mystic. Skipsey and Linton are united by an awareness of the potential of secular-mystic correspondence, and it is an awareness shared amongst other Blake lovers in this period. Swinburne, for example, emerges as a political aesthete in this schema. From the “One” of Blake’s *Jerusalem* - “[...] we behold as one, / As One Man all the Universal Family” (*Jer* 33[37]:18 – 19, E180) - we move to a new expression of the Universal Self in the Victorian period. The cry taken up by the avant-garde and radicals from Swinburne to Linton is that of the “Universal Republic”. For Skipsey, the labour and voice of the common man is poetically (and to some extent politically) interpreted as a common labour, drawing an ever increasing circle of the Universal Spirit:

A circle round the hearthstone, young and olden,  
The family gather, and their feelings blend  
And inter-blend till in a concord golden,  
As one they labour for some common end.

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285 “The Seer” in *Miscellaneous Lyrics*, pp.5 - 9 (p.7).

In time those circles form but inner circles  
To circles greater, till the nations act  
As one vast soul whose spheres with glory sparkles,  
And heaven the dream on earth is heaven the fact.<sup>286</sup>

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286 "The Downfall of Mammon" in *Miscellaneous Lyrics*, pp.140 - 144 (p.142).

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Illuminating the Book: Jerome McGann's textual criticism in relation to Gilchrist's Life*

For Blake to “survive” the nineteenth century, the personal had not only to become political, but also public. The personal testament of critical/cultural discourse had to take up the rhythm of Skipsey’s ever-expanding circles and embrace new reading communities. The text had to be edited and inserted into a literary culture. Jerome McGann’s theory of the text links cultural discourse and personal concerns to editorial practice. In the following discussion, the incisiveness of this theory in dissecting Blake’s nineteenth-century reception history will be demonstrated, placed against the background of Fredson Bower’s “New Bibliography”, and illustrated by example from Gilchrist’s *Life*.<sup>287</sup>

Jerome McGann’s innovations in the field of textual criticism can be broadly summarised into three interrelated parts: 1) the concept of the text, produced and reproduced, as a series of materially-entailed cultural events, 2) the mapping of bibliographic encoding onto linguistic encoding, and 3) textual production and reproduction relocated in “[...] the dialectic between the historically located individual

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287 The method of textual criticism that Fredson Bowers is advocate of, and associated with, is the Lachmann method of the eclectic text, or ideal copy. For Bowers, manuscript work is the ultimate authority: “When an author’s manuscript is preserved, this has paramount authority, of course. Yet the fallacy is still maintained that since the first edition was proofread by the author, it must represent his final intentions and hence should be chosen as copy-text. Practical experience shows the contrary [...] Thus the editor must choose the manuscript as his major authority, correcting from the first edition only what are positive errors in the accidentals of the manuscript”, Fredson Bowers, “Some Principles for Scholarly Editions of Nineteenth-Century American Authors” in *Bibliography and Textual Criticism: 1700 to the present*, eds O.M. Brack and Warner Barnes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp.197 – 98. This passage is quoted in Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1992), pp.5 – 6. *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* shall be referred to in the following discussion as *Mod. Text*.



author and the historically developing institutions of literary production” (*Mod. Text.*, p.81).

As regards number 1) above, the cultural reconstitution of the material text. McGann outlines a “methodological schema”<sup>288</sup> for textual criticism. McGann divides the text into a series of three moments: A) *The Originary Textual Moment*, B) *Secondary Moments of Textual Production and Reproduction*, and C) *The Immediate Moment of Textual Criticism*. The primary moment A), consists of the author and collaborators producing the text with “[...]materials, means and modes of the initial productive process (physical, psychological, ideological)”. The intermediary moment B), is arranged under “[...] two periodic subsets” divided between “[...] periods of production and reproduction carried out during the author’s lifetime” and “[...] the periods of production and reproduction which begin with the author’s death” (*Monks and Giants* , p.82 -3). It is the third moment, the interpretative moment, that is important both for a consideration of nineteenth-century reproduction of Blake’s works, and the dialectical process of past and present textual encounters: “This category calls for a critical analysis of the immediate critic’s own programmatic goals and purposes. This is probably the most demanding of all critical tasks, since it involves a critical presentation of events which do not lie in a completed form of pastness, but which are coincident with the entire act of analysis itself” (*Monks and Giants*, p.83). In McGann’s cultural bibliography, the eclectic text of the Lachmann method and the New Bibliographers - whose aim is to reconstruct the lost document of original authorship - is a “Frankenstein text”, sewn together with the immediate cultural concerns of the editor-critic. A blatant example of the “Frankenstein” reproduction of a text can be found in Gilchrist’s *Life*.

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288 Jerome McGann, “The Monks and the Giants: textual and bibliographical studies and the interpretation of literary works” in *The Beauty of Inflections: literary investigations in historical method and theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp.69 - 89 (p.81).

The reproduction of *America* plate 8 in the 1863 edition and the 1880 edition shows, through comparison, the textual shape sorting and shifting that McGann describes.

There is a difference in reproduction between the two editions of the *Life*. The 1880 edition simply states: “Facing pages 109 and 110, however, we give facsimiles of two whole pages from the *America*” (*Life* 1880, I, p.109). The 1863 edition indicates that the reproduction in its pages replaces more of the original design: “We are compelled also to substitute our formal type for the author’s flowing hand written poetry. Facing page 112, however, we give the fac-simile of a whole page from the *America*” (*Life* 1863, I, p.111). This commentary gives the appearance that whereas the 1880 edition contains two facsimiles, the 1863 edition contains only one and transcribes the other plate (8) in letterpress. However, the bibliographic “presentation” is “coincident” with the critical commentary, and the “immediate critic’s own programmatic goals and purposes” are very evident.

Gilchrist’s criticism of *America* in both the 1863 and 1880 editions is a cacophony of the visual. He literally opens his criticism with the opening of the eye to the page:

Turning over the leaves, it is sometimes like an increase of daylight on the retina. so fair and open is the effect of particular pages. The skies of sapphire, or gold, rayed with hues of sunset, against which stand out leaf or blossom or pendant branch, gay with bright plumaged birds; the strips of emerald sward below, gemmed with flower and lizard and enamelled snake, refresh the eye continually. (*Life* 1863, I, p.12; *Life* 1880, I, p.109)

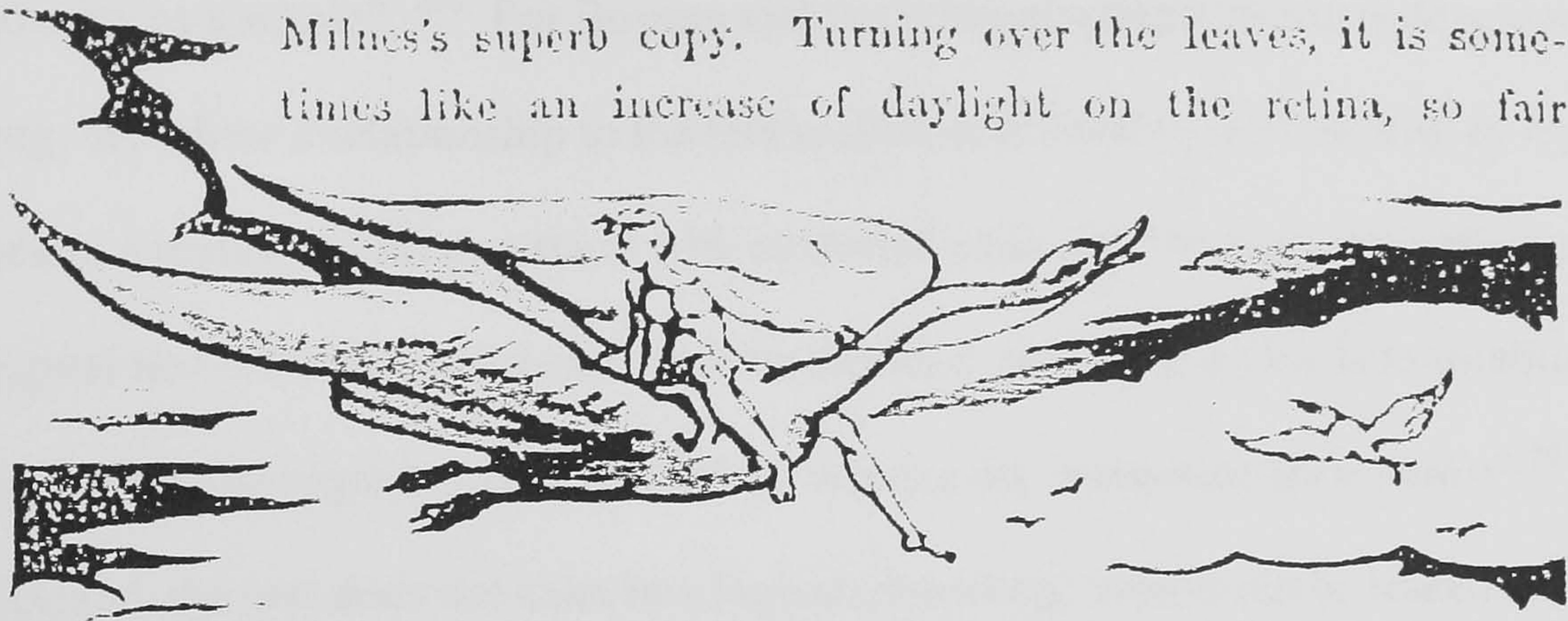
The contrast between the 1863 and 1880 editions, illustrates how strongly the Gilchrist's vision of the "open retina", of the sensuous space between viewer and artist, was manifest in the original biography. In the 1880 edition, plate 8 is opposite the above commentary, illustrating the visual vistas described, but remaining part of a distinctly different and integral work, namely *America*. The 1863 edition, however, imbeds this piece of the biography within the designs of the plate where the original text should be (*figure 13*). The criticism that celebrates and invokes the designs becomes part of a new bibliographic artefact, created through a synthesis of authorial work and interpretative work, and also of linguistic text and graphic text. The material production of the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* binds commentary to creativity, originality to reproduction. The space and time of Blake's works are drawn into a direct configuration with another space and time. The text in the present undergoes a recontextualization of its origin through the creation of a new hermeneutic framework. The material presence of the text is continually resurrected in a new form, which is always slightly new, slightly different. This is an illogical position when viewed from a traditional perspective of authorial intention and ideal copy. The editor is placed in the seemingly untenable position of both preserver and desecrator of authorship. This is not simply a case of realising there may be more than one established text of a given author's work.

The variation of "substantives" and "accidentals"<sup>289</sup> is at the heart of textual criticism: "The various methods for establishing a manuscript text depend, in general, upon the collation of all known copies, the systematic separation of texts into allied divisions, and the construction of a family tree that will reveal the primary sources of authority". Fredson Bowers goes on to list some of the methodological sub-genres deployed to

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289 Walter Greg, "The Rationale of Copy-Text" in *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950 - 51), pp.19 ff.

Milnes's superb copy. Turning over the leaves, it is sometimes like an increase of daylight on the retina, so fair



and open is the effect of particular pages. The skies of sapphire, or gold, rayed with hues of sunset, against which stand out leaf or blossom, or pendant branch, gay with bright plumaged birds; the strips of emerald sward below, gemmed with flower and lizard and enamelled snake, refresh the eye continually.

Some of the illustrations are of a more sombre kind. There is one in which a little corpse, white as snow, lies gleaming on the floor of a green overarching cave, which close inspection proves to be a field of wheat, whose slender interlacing stalks, bowed by the full ear and by a gentle breeze,

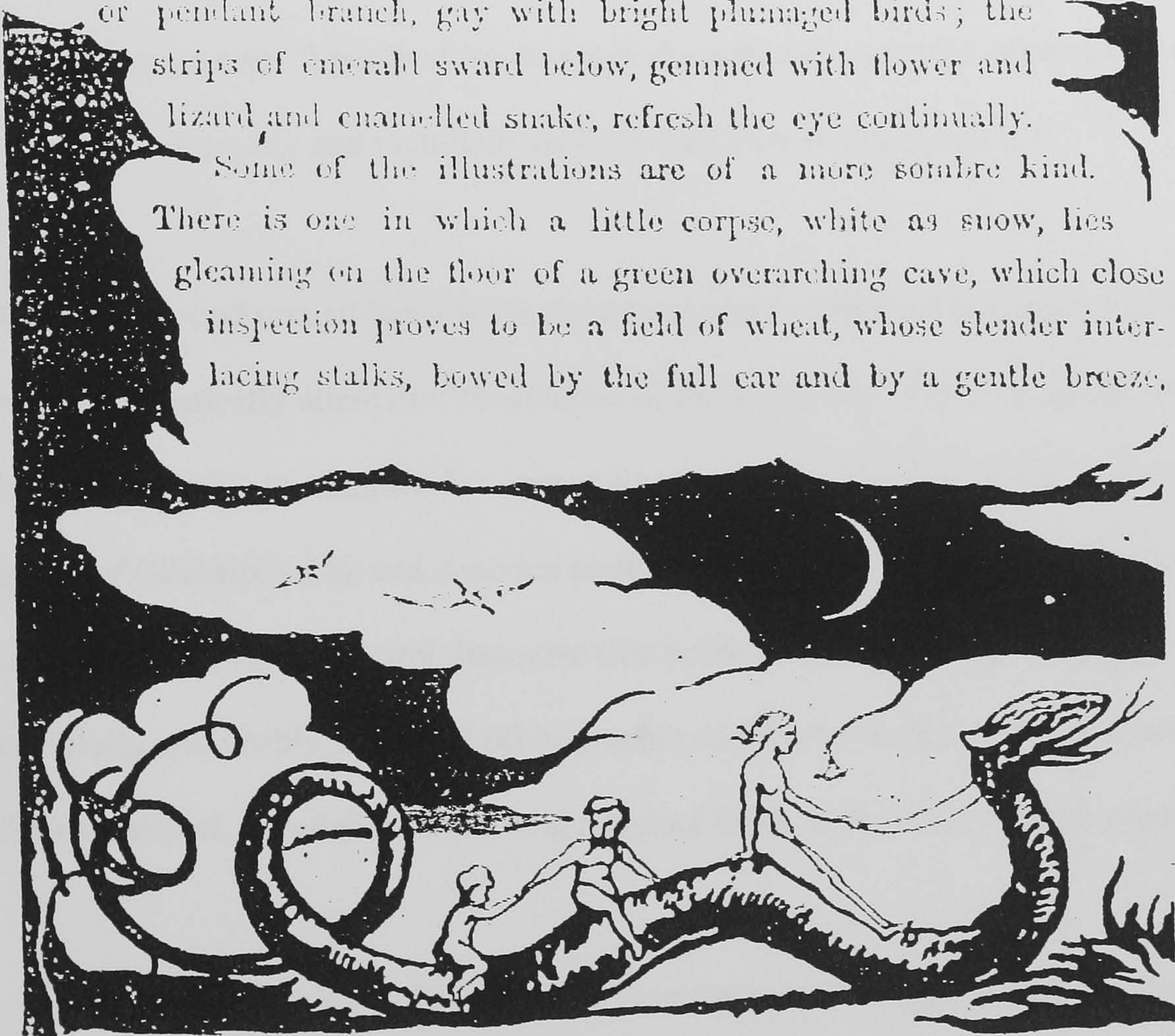


figure 13

establish the text including “[...] linguistic analysis, palaeographical reasoning, and literary criticism applied to the various primary documents, all of technically equal authority as a whole”.<sup>290</sup> For Bowers and the bibliographical tradition developed by Greg, the editor’s relationship to the text is always defined by a *rescensio*, or reaching back to a textual origin that starts with authorial intention: “In each individual case the original text either has or has not been transmitted. So our first task is to establish what *must* or *may* be regarded as transmitted - to make the rescension (*rescensio*)”.<sup>291</sup> For McGann, the text does not exist in a logical genealogy, which can be traced as a “family tree”. Rather, the text and the work are constantly mutating, and the seeds of that mutation are in the historical and material conditions of production. As Ralph G. Williams comments: “I proceed not so much theoretically as by the observation of the instability historically and materially of the boundaries of the actual text”.<sup>292</sup>

McGann’s second textual innovation, the re-encoding of the text bibliographically as well as linguistically alters the “boundaries of the actual text”. The susceptibility of textual boundaries to mutation becomes a literal metaphor in the case of the 1863 edition of Gilchrist’s *Life and America* plate 8. In this example the boundaries consist not just of a linguistic-cultural discourse (the poem/criticism of the poem), but, powerfully and visibly, of visual-bibliographic codes (the design/the book illustration). These entwined, encoded boundaries are textual DNA at the heart of book production:

Every literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a

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290 Fredson Bowers, *Essays in Bibliography, Text and Editing* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1975), p.360.

291 Paul Maas, *Textual Criticism*, trans. Barbara Flower (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p.1.

292 Ralph G. Williams, “I Shall Be Spoken: textual boundaries, authors and intent” in *Palimpsest: editorial theory in the humanities*, eds George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp.45 – 66 ( p.46).

double helix of perceptual codes: the linguistic codes, on one hand, and the bibliographic on the other.

We recognise the latter simply by *looking* at a medieval manuscript - or at any of William Blake's equivalent illuminated texts produced in (the teeth of) the age of mechanical reproduction. (*Text.Cond.* p.77)

McGann's thinking concerning the interaction of bibliographic and linguistic codes locks into both the material exactitude of Blake's original illuminated works and the reproductive evolution of those works. The text does not exist as a linguistic abstract, but as a sensuous manifestation of human labour. The bibliographical becomes, in a sense, perceptual, immediate. This has certain connotations for the reproduction history of texts.

From a Greg/Bowers perspective, a text has a genealogy that can be traced back to the origins of its production. Blake, as described by McGann, should therefore present no problem to a textual critic from the Greg school: "When Blake assumed the roles of author, editor, illustrator, printer, and distributor, he was plainly aspiring to become a literary institution unto himself" (*Mod.Text.*, p.47). Blake's production process is unadulterated by editorial oversights or printers' errors. In Blake's production technique, there is inherent protection against a tradition in which "[...] our texts have constituted a huge drift of signification" (Williams, "I Shall Be Spoken", p.51). As McGann puts it: "To read a Blake text or a facsimile in an original format is to be told that 'author's intentions' dominate the bibliographical signifiers in the same way that they dominate the linguistic signifiers. And while this is true, to a certain (but very limited) extent, for Blake, it is not true for most authors" (*Text. Cond.*, p.55).

Yet, Blake, perhaps more than any other Romantic poet, was subject to editorial intrusion. The reason for this is two-fold and ironic. As McGann goes on to point out, there is a problem with Blake's intense appropriation of the means of textual production: "Unfortunately, he could not also assume the role of one crucial component of that institution as it existed in his period: the reviewer" (*Text. Cond.* p.55). When the critics did begin to take notice of Blake, their critical position on his works, and on his life, influenced decisions regarding the reproduction of his text: "Blake's singular personal reputation also made him a subject for editorial liberties. The problems in Shelley's manuscript poems were complex, and there were biographical complications too: but Shelley did not labor under the double disadvantage of self-education and alleged insanity" (*Nineteenth Century*, p.108). With the publication of Gilchrist's *Life*, these disadvantages enter into a dialectical relationship with the nineteenth-century literary establishment, the 1863 edition becoming, in this sense, the institutionalizing moment of Blake's reputation. The critical/institutional mediation of the 1863 *Life* is a story of control, reaction and revolt. This is the cue for McGann's third area of innovation, the dialectic between author and institution. The publication dialectic occurred as regards the *Life*, not only diachronically between Romantic author and Victorian editor, but synchronically between a cautious editor and an aesthetic rebel.

Anne Gilchrist presents herself as navigating a course around the transgressive elements of Blake's works rather than engaging directly with them.<sup>293</sup> It would be far too easy to

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293 "I am afraid you will be vexed with me that I was afraid to adopt entirely that most vigorous and admirable little bit a propos of the "Daughters of Albion." But it was no use to put in what I was perfectly certain Macmillan (who reads all the Proofs) would take out again. I am certain of this from past experiences - but I would have *tried it* at an earlier stage; but as that sheet has been twice set up - and has now kept us at a standstill for three weeks, I did not think it right to do so: I therefore "reduced the subject" to still less - to a very shadowy condition indeed - but left enough, I trust, for the cause of truth and honesty. It might be well perhaps to mention to Mr Swinburne, if he is so kind as to do what was proposed, that it would be perfectly useless to attempt to handle this side of Blake's writings - that Mr. Macmillan is far more inexorable against any shade of heterodoxy in morals than religion - and that in fact, poor "flustered propriety" would have to be most tenderly and indulgently dealt with" (*Anne Gilchrist*, pp.127 - 128).

accuse Anne Gilchrist of queasiness in the face of breaking taboos, and of misrepresenting Blake to the book-reading public. Anne had to strike a balance between the social values of publication (defined and delimited by Macmillan the publisher) and the poetic value of the original work (centred in Blake the author). On one level, this is simply the practicalities of publication. Macmillan will not publish what he sees as morally renegade work. Anne needs to negotiate around this position by “smoothing over” what she herself calls the “most vigorous and admirable little bit” of Blake’s *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. But Swinburne saw the question of Blake’s moral transgression quite differently, and wanted to engage with it head on.<sup>294</sup>

The textual condition in which Blake’s works came to be reproduced for a larger audience was almost inevitably the result of such cultural exchange: “Also, his productive processes were such that he could not mass-produce his works, so that his fame, his full appreciation and influence, had to wait upon his death, and intervention of a number of important persons who never even knew him” (*Mod. Text.*, p.47). The problem associated with the mid-century revival of Blake is how to rehabilitate a radical thinker and visionary mystic into conventional society and canonical literature. There is a delicate balance between embrace and independence to be struck. McGann sees Blake’s “popularity” as the result of a web of social and cultural interchange: “In his own day Blake insisted upon having his artistic freedom, and the proper measure of his success in this aim - ironic though it seems - lies in his contemporary artistic anonymity. Yet the social life of an artist transcends his particular historical moment, and so Blake.

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294 “Much more I think might have been done at starting without any handling of the hot cinder or treading on the quagmire which a virtuous editor seems so abjectly afraid of. As it is, it seems to me the best thing for the book and for those interested in it is to leave it alone, for fear of bursting the old bottles - a Scotch publisher would no doubt receive a reference to the sacred text as unanswerable. I should have been delighted to help in the work originally, and coming in as a free auxiliary to the best of my means of work; but I see no good possible to do at this point, even if one disliked less the notion of doing service for Blake under the eye of such a taskmaster as the chaste Macmillan” (“Letter to William Michael Rossetti, 6th October 1862” in *Swin. Letts*, I, p.60).



lost to his own age, was 'discovered' by the Pre-Raphaelites, who initiated the process of full social integration which his work has since achieved".<sup>295</sup> The uniqueness of Blake's production technique<sup>296</sup> meant that there would inevitably be huge difficulties in mass producing his works in their original form at their point of historical origin. Consequently, his works had their seeds of posthumous mutation already "materially scripted" in their production.

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295 Jerome McGann, "The Text, the Poem and the Problem of Historical Method" in *New Literary History: a journal of theory and interpretation* 2 (Winter 1981), pp.269 - 288 (p.276).

296 See Robert Essick, *William Blake Printmaker* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.85 - 166 for a detailed description of relief etching and Blake's colouring techniques. See also W.J.T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: a study of the illuminated poetry* (Princeton University Press, 1978), pp.40 - 41.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Editing the Books and Editing for Books: Blake's poetry in Gilchrist's Life and Swinburne's William Blake*

The Pre-Raphaelite free with Blake's works came packaged in the beauty of the book, and certified by poetic proprietorship. In a sense this re-packaging colluded in wiping out Blake's books, creating a *tabula rasa* on which Dante Rossetti and Algernon Swinburne projected their own creativity. Deborah Dorfmann, comments on Volume II of Gilchrist's *Life* that "[n]othing engraved by Blake after 1794 appeared in the Volume". Only *Thel* was published of the prophetic poems (*Nineteenth Century*, p.101) and a glance at the contents page of the second Volume of the 1863 edition<sup>297</sup> reveals something that is even more interesting. Along with *Thel*, the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are the only *illuminated* works of Blake printed in the selections, reproduced in conventional letterpress. The later illuminated works do make an appearance in the *Life*, in a mutilated and mutated form. But their appearance in Volume I and disappearance in Volume II is indicative of Rossetti's and Swinburne's systematic "shaking up" of Blake's works.

*The Poetical Sketches* are the earliest works of Blake to be reproduced and his only work (apart from *The French Revolution*) to be formally published in his lifetime. Deborah Dorfmann sees the treatment of the *Poetical Sketches*, by both Rossetti and Swinburne, as an exercise in aesthetic formalism.<sup>298</sup> Bearing in mind Swinburne's

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297 See "Contents of Volume II", *Life* 1863, II, pp.v - viii.

298 "To Rossetti, and to Swinburne in a more qualified way, poetry was to be defined, evaluated and defended if necessary on formal grounds, not on the basis of its subject matter. They therefore submitted the Songs in *Poetical Sketches*, which Gilchrist praises mainly for directness or simplicity to more specifically poetic criteria. In this way they hoped to disarm condescensions to 'immature form' and to

comments concerning the “instinct of form” and “the exquisite desire of just and perfect work” (AS, p.109), the way in which Rossetti and Swinburne edited the *Poetical Sketches* seems to be a quest for the perfect aesthetic form. However, the different revisions made by Rossetti and Swinburne in “To the Evening Star” reveal a difference of aesthetic opinion between the two poets. The transcription of lines 5 – 8 in Erdman reads:

Smile on our loves; and, while thou drawest the  
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew  
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes  
In timely sleep.  
(E 410)

Dorfmann notes that Rossetti changes the lines to:

Smile on our loves; and *whilst thou drawest round*  
*The curtains of the sky, scatter thy dew*  
On every flower that *closes* its sweet eyes  
In timely sleep.  
(*Life* 1863, II, p.10)

Swinburne went “one better”, if that term is applicable in these circumstances, in

*William Blake:*

Smile on our loves; and while thou drawest *round*

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demonstrate that a number of the *Sketches* would stand on poetical merits alone, without reference to their precociousness or to their anticipation of *Lyrical Ballads*” ( *Nineteenth Century*, p.116).

*The sky's blue curtains, scatter silver dew*

On every flower that *closes* its sweet eyes

In timely sleep.

(*AS*, p.11)

Dorfmann sees the changes as shifting the focus on to particular imagery, and ironing out metrical irregularities.<sup>299</sup> It is hard to read these revisions to Blake's poetry side by side, together with Dorfmann's highlighting of their poetic style, and not to see a jostling of aesthetic prowess, a flexing of poetic muscle. Already in the slight but significant changes that Swinburne makes to Rossetti's amendments, a division of aesthetic direction may be detected. Rossetti favours an ornateness of expression and grammar, that emphasises the antique quality of the *Songs*, in line with his preface to the *Poetical Sketches* in the selections to Gilchrist's *Life*.<sup>300</sup> Rossetti also comments on Blake's "[...]return to the diction and high feeling of a greater age" (*Life* 1863, II, p.25). Swinburne's amendments also seek to reinforce the aesthetic style of Blake's poetry, but the concern is not with the antiquation of poetic form, but with its force. Swinburne loses the lazy "whilst" and "thy" of Rossetti's style, favouring the descriptive force of Blake's original "blue" and "silver". At the same time he goes further than Blake in focusing down the metaphor, removing the "of" of "Blue curtains of the sky", and replacing it with the possessive "The sky's blue curtains".

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299 "Besides regularizing the meter Swinburne's change shifts attention from drawing blue curtains to the night sky; Rossetti's eliminates a more arresting literal image. Both changes, particularly Rossetti's, suggest an objection not to literalism as such but to making the intrinsically poetic evening sky prosaic" (*Nineteenth Century*, pp.119 – 120).

300 "These Songs are certainly among the small class of modern times which recall the best period of English song writing, whose rarest treasures lie scattered among the plays of our Elizabethan dramatists. [...] Besides what is here given, there are attempts in the very modern-antique style of ballad prevalent at the time, and in Ossianic prose" ( Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "Preface to the Poetical Sketches" *Life* 1863, II, p.3).

In the editing of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, the aesthetic decisions made by the poet editors are mitigated by other concerns for both Rossetti and Swinburne. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, poems from both *Innocence* and *Experience* were published in magazines and anthologies, usually selected on the basis of fitting a themed criteria, often set in a specific cultural or religious context and sometimes carrying a distinct political message. For Rossetti, the inclusion of draft copies of poems from *Experience* in the notebook known as the Rossetti manuscript, allowed him to adulterate Blake's best known works with a hint of Pre-Raphaelite exclusivity.

David Erdman, in the 1973 facsimile edition of Blake's notebook, described Dante Rossetti's binding and transcription of the notebook, when it came into Rossetti's possession on 30th April 1847.<sup>301</sup> The binding together of Blake's work in progress and Rossetti's creative transcription is a twist in the sobriety of the manuscript poems: draft poems, emblems, all infused with the immediate energy of Blake's imagination, became riddled with the trademark Rossetti "freewheeling editorial practices".<sup>302</sup> Most of Rossetti's emendations to the *Songs* involved splicing together the notebook variations of *Experience* with the versions engraved - and in some cases already reproduced in conventional letterpress - in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. He added a second "Cradle Song", included in draft form in the notebook (*Nineteenth Century*, p.121) and probably at some stage intended for inclusion in *Experience* as a companion piece to the poem of the same name in *Innocence*.<sup>303</sup> Rossetti mentions the inclusion of the second

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301 "Introduction", in *The Notebook of William Blake: a photographic and typographic facsimile*, ed. David Erdman, with the assistance of Donald K. Moore (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p.1: "When William Blake died, in 1827, his wife Catherine gave this book of sketches to an artist, William Palmer, brother of Blake's closer friend Samuel Palmer. It was next acquired by the poet and artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who had it bound in half calf with a partial and imperfect transcript of some of the poems - headed 'All that is of any worth in the book' - inserted at the back" Hereafter this edition will be referred to as *Notebook*, followed by page number(s).

302 Mark L. Greenberg, "The Rossettis' Transcription of Blake's *Notebook*" in *Library* Ser VI 5:4 (1982), pp.249 - 72, (p.252).

303 See Geoffrey Keynes commentary to the Notebook Poems in William Blake, *The Complete Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.889, n. to p.164.

poem in the preface.<sup>304</sup> In accordance with the notebook title, "A Poison Tree" becomes "Christian Forbearance" (*Life* 1863, II, p.25).

Sometimes the knitting together of notebook and engraved poems joined disparate material. As Deborah Dorfmann notes, Rossetti "[...] added two opening stanzas to 'The Garden of Love,' again taking them from the *Notebook*; these are not from an early draft of the poem, but from another poem clearly separated from the draft by a line in the manuscript" (*Nineteenth Century*, p.121). David Erdman's transcription of the notebook confirms the distinction of the two poems, and indeed the facsimile of the notebook shows an observable line separating the poems.

What such a glaring mismatch points-up is not Rossetti's inadequacies as an editor, but his blind enthusiasm to be the prophet and possessor of the Pre-Raphaelite Blake. The authority which both Dante Gabriel and William Michael Rossetti saw invested in their possession of the notebook is illustrated in William Michael Rossetti's insistence in the Aldine Blake that his brother's version of "The Tyger" had manuscript authority.<sup>305</sup> William Michael transcribed a private version of the notebook for William Bell Scott, which Scott bound with his own tracings from the notebook into his copy of the 1839 Wilkinson edition.<sup>306</sup> The Rossetti transcriptions illustrate that Blake (as author) is

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304 "One piece, the second Cradle Song, I have myself introduced from the MS. note-book often referred to, since there can be no doubt that it was written to match with the first, and it has quite sufficient beauty to give it a right to its natural place" ("Preface to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*", *Life* 1863, II, p.25).

305 See "Prefatory Memoir", *The Poetical Works of William Blake*, ed. William Michael Rossetti, (London: George Bell, 1874), p.xxxii. Rossetti actually based his emendations on Allan Cunningham's version. Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Aldine Blake* followed by page number(s).

306 Mark L. Greenberg, "William Michael Rossetti's Transcription and William Bell Scott's Tracings from Blake's *Notebook*" in *Library Ser VI* 5:6 (1984), pp.254 – 70, (p.255): "As this catalogue reported [Sotheby's sale catalogue of 3 December 1962], Scott bound his twelve leaves of sketches and twenty-nine leaves of transcribed verse into his copy of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (London: W.Pickering and W. Newberry, 1839) – the first letterpress printing of Blake's composite art work [Garth Wilkinson's edition]. Scott's copy bears the presentation inscription, 'W.B. Scott. From his sister Ellen Epps'"

caught up in the Rossetti mind-set with the workings of the poet's thought-process, revealed in manuscript fragments. There is a thirst for origin in their constant deferral to the notebook, and this in turn is related to their status as fellow poets and artists capable of understanding the source of poetic inspiration. The Pre-Raphaelites present themselves as a privileged group of Blake interpreters. This assumed mantle of aesthetic privilege and poetic insight goes some way to explain the amendments made to Blake's poetry, even at its manuscript source.

Swinburne also saw himself as a true inheritor of Blake's works, but, as can be seen in his different approach to editing the *Songs*, Swinburne saw himself as a political, not simply poetical, inheritor.<sup>307</sup> The hermeneutic burden that Swinburne places on the reader of Blake is inextricable, as Dorfmann tells us, from Swinburne's own politico-aesthetic struggle for understanding and meaning.<sup>308</sup> In editing quotations from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in *William Blake: a critical essay*, Swinburne strikes out against the twin pillars of a burgeoning capitalist world - the moral law and materialism. Swinburne's Gnostic concerns, both in the spheres of morality and materiality, can be traced in his editing of the "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience*. Taking first of all the moral law, Dorfmann points out that Swinburne's emendations to the first stanza "[...]give the poem and the bard of Experience, a plainly pagan aspect" (*Nineteenth Century*, p.133). The opening stanza reads in Erdman.

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307 "[...] Swinburne fashioned an appreciation for Blake's lyrics which D.G. Rossetti had published primarily on the basis of their lyrical beauties - and thus an access to the prophecies. When he affirmed their appropriate values he departed from the purely formalist approach he had taken with D.G. Rossetti toward *Poetical Sketches*. In positive terms he instituted new standards of judgement and placed greater demands upon the readers of Blake's poems" (*Nineteenth Century*, pp.128 - 129).

308 Swinburne "[...] begins to use Blake's unorthodox definitions in contexts that suggests his personal revolt against the society of Victorian England in the 1860s. [...]. Insofar as Experience frees man from restraints of moral law Swinburne takes the side of the devil and is much more personally engaged than when speaking of Innocence. Generally he regards 'actual' experience as the proper theme of the artist.

Hear the voice of the Bard!  
Who Present, Past & Future sees  
Whose ears have heard,  
The Holy Word,  
That walk'd among the ancient trees  
(S of I&E 31:1 – 5, E18)

Swinburne replaces “Holy” with “ancient” in the fourth line, and “ancient” with “silent” in the fifth (*Nineteenth Century*, p.133). I would suggest that the amendment in the fifth line is necessitated by the amendment in the fourth (the repetition of “ancient” being untenable to a creative poet such as Swinburne) and that the crucial change is from “Holy” to “ancient”. It is not simply the single word “Holy” that is an anathema to Swinburne the libertine, but the line “The Holy Word”. Swinburne cuts loose any bonds to a logocentric language of divine authority, and instead substitutes a sense of language as historical entity. In the other emendations that Swinburne makes to stanzas from the “Introduction” to *Experience*, Dorfmann sees Swinburne moving away from Blake’s enclosing of the Earth in the mundane shell of the material nature: “Blake’s lines seem to remind the earth that she is condemned in her nature (or so long as the sky *appears* a floor); Swinburne’s suggest a more material consolation, especially when he comments: ‘During the night of law and oppression of material form, the divine evidences hidden under the sky and sea are left her (p.118)’” (*Nineteenth Century*, pp.133 – 4). The lines in question read thus in Erdman:

Turn away no more:

Why wilt thou turn away?

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The world of the *Songs of Innocence* is one of ‘outer forms’; the poems of *Experience* lay bare ‘the actual mysteries of experience’” (*Nineteenth Century*, pp.130 – 131).



The starry floor  
The watry shore  
Is giv`n thee till the break of day.  
(*S of I&E* 31:16 – 20, E18)

Swinburne inverts the endings of lines three and four of the stanza to read “The starry shore/ The watery floor”, and also changes the verb “Is” in the fifth line to “Are” (*Nineteenth Century*, p.133; *AS*, p.118). Dorfmann reads the inversion as a reversal of the material illusion of Blake’s “starry floor”, seeing Swinburne as grounding the metaphor in the material reality of “watery floor”, and thus the “material consolation” of a “divine liberal impulse”. However, Dorfmann’s reading of the Swinburne quotation given to back up this interpretation of the editorial inversion wrongly attributes the grammatical structure. In the prepositional phrase “oppression of material form”, Dorfman aligns “of” to the head noun “oppression. In fact, “form” is the head noun, and “oppression of” and “material” act as determiners to that noun. In practical terms of interpretation, it is a question of cause and effect. It is not material form that is being actively oppressed, as expressed in the prepositional structure of “oppression of”, but it is form, in its materiality, that is actively oppressive. Of course, there is ambiguity in the grammatical structure here, and the phrase could be interpreted either way. However, Swinburne’s appraisal of “Earth’s Answer”, following immediately on from his comments on the “Introduction”, justify the second reading of the clause which I have given:

Thus in the poet’s mind, Nature and Religion are the two fetters of life, one on the right wrist, the other on the left; an obscure material force on this hand, and on that a mournful imperious law; the law of divine jealousy, the government of

a God who weeps over his creature and subject with unprofitable tears, and rules by forbidding and dividing; the 'Urizen' of the prophetic books, clothed with coldness and the grief of remote sky and jealous cloud. (*AS*, pp.118 – 119)

In this context, it seems as if Swinburne's editorial inversion in the "Introduction" works to harden the reality of material nature, reflecting "the remote sky" as "[t]he starry shore" in the mirror of "[t]he watery floor". The material world encloses itself in self-reflection to become an "obscure material force[...] clothed with coldness and the grief of remote sky and jealous cloud".

The "obscure material force" of Blake's complex composite art in the prophetic books seems, at one level, to confound the editorial policy of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the *Life*. The contents page to the selections in Volume II tells us that there was a separation in the mind of the Gilchrist collaborators between the lyricism of Blake's poetry and the vision of Blake's composite art. The poetry is treated as lyrical experimentation, which could be rearranged and reabsorbed into nineteenth-century conventions of literature and letterpress. It is almost as if Rossetti separated oil from water in the selections, saying this is poetry, and this is something else. The something else, almost exclusively constituted by the complex signification and kaleidoscopic narratives of the prophetic books, is treated as beyond the remit of editorial trickery. A different approach is employed in the assimilation of the later illuminated works. As already noted, no work printed after 1794 was included in the selections of Volume II. However, in the body of the biographical Volume I, there are large chunks of quotations from later works, broken up by explication. This is a method of textual reproduction that Swinburne was to copy in *William Blake: a critical essay*. The entwining of critical discourse with textual transmission in Volume I of *The Life of William Blake* is

particularly prevalent where the Prophetic Books are being described. This method of textual interpretation reached a crescendo with *Jerusalem* in chapter XXI (*Life* 1863, I, pp.181 – 98).

The textual condition of *Jerusalem* as represented in the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *Life*, has three distinct, yet interwoven strands. Firstly, there is the reproduction in letterpress of passages from *Jerusalem*. Secondly, these extracts are closely interweaved with the simultaneous explication of that text. Thirdly, there is the graphic reproduction of the text.

The explication of *Jerusalem* in Gilchrist's *Life* in 1863 is not so much a critical exegesis as a meditation on the density of language that constitutes *Jerusalem*:

The *Jerusalem* bears little resemblance to the 'prophetic books' of earlier date. We hear no longer of the wars, the labours, the sufferings, the laments of Orc, Rintrah, Urizen, or Enitharmon; though some of these names are casually mentioned once or twice. What we do hear of, the reader shall gather for himself, from a few extracts. The following lines instance in brief, the devout and earnest spirit in which Blake wrote; the high aims he set before him; and afford also a glimpse of the most strange and unhappy result: dark oracles, words empty of meaning to all but him who uttered them. (*Life* 1863, p.184)

There then follows a half page quotation from *Jerusalem*, plate 5. The critical commentary then continues:

Of these names, many never occur again throughout the book: and to the remainder we, to the last, fail to attach any idea whatever. Their owners cannot even be spoken of as shadows, for a shadow has a certain definiteness of form. But these continue *mere* names. Perhaps abstract qualities, of some kind or other, may be the things signified; for the *Jerusalem*, so far as I can understand it, is an allegory in which the lapse of the human race from a higher spiritual state, and its struggles towards a return to such, are the main topics. 'Jerusalem' is once spoken of as 'Liberty;' she is also apostrophized as 'mild shade of man,' and must perhaps, on the whole, be taken to symbolize this ideal state. (*Life* 1863, p.185)

The eye is of great importance in the interpretation and ordering of the literary world to the Gilchrists, and at one point, the weight of Blake's *visual* language - both text and graphic - completely subjects the reader's vision: "It were scarcely honest to call these extracts, *specimens* of the *Jerusalem*. They are exceptions, rather than specimens; and occur, for the most part, in the midst of such a chaos of words, names, and images, that, as the eye wanders, hopeless and dispirited, up and down the large closely-written pages, the mind cannot choose but busy itself with the question, how a man of Blake's high gifts ever came to produce such; nay, to consider this, as he really did, his greatest work" (*Life* 1863, I, p.192). The reaction to the linguistic and visual "chaos" of *Jerusalem*, in terms of its reproduction in Gilchrist's biography, is in a sense logical, yet still surprising. The reproduction of the text in conventional letterpress is not emended apart from grammatical "corrections" and modernisation of spelling. Where amendments are made, they are signalled. For example a quotation on page 190 from *Jerusalem*, plate 77 (To the Christians) reads in Gilchrist thus: "Imagination [is] the real and eternal world, of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow: and in which

we shall live, in our eternal or imaginative bodies, when these vegetable mortal bodies are no more” (*Life* 1863, I, p.190). The editorial emendation - “[is]” - is clearly bracketed and the creative editing of Rossetti in the selections is certainly not in evidence. This leads me to believe that it is almost certainly one of the Gilchrists who edited the quotations in Volume I. I am inclined to favour Anne’s hand in the work, whose editorial skill is so often forgotten. The effacement of Anne from the *Life’s* editorial roll of honour had to be corrected by William Michael Rossetti: “Mrs Gilchrist has edited it, and (if I may be permitted to say so) very efficiently”.<sup>309</sup>

Besides this non-intrusive quotation of passages from the text there runs the graphic reproduction of *Jerusalem*. This third strand in the reproduction of *Jerusalem* is something that the prophetic books share in common in Volume I of Gilchrist’s *Life*. The illuminated works, particularly *Jerusalem*, are visually edited and assimilated into the text of the critical biography. In comparison to the contents page of the selections in Volume II, the list of illustrations in Volume I<sup>310</sup> reveals that *Jerusalem* is the work of Blake used as tailpieces, borders etc. most frequently in the biography.<sup>311</sup> In a reversal from the editorial policy pursued in the selections, no graphic to an illuminated book engraved and printed *before* 1793 appears in Volume I, illustrations from *America*<sup>312</sup> and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*<sup>313</sup> being the earliest. The decision may have been taken between Anne Gilchrist, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William James Linton to concentrate on the later prophetic books and illuminated works, as the facsimile publication of them would be beyond the scope of the selections, and there being a

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309 “To the Editor of the *Reader*” in *Reader* 11 (7<sup>th</sup> Novemehr 1863), p.544.

310 See “List of Illustrations”, *Life* 1863, I, pp.xiii - xiv.

311 *Life* 1863, I, pp.27, 50, 51, 75, 186 - 188, 193 - 194, 209, 216.

312 *Life* 1863, I, pp.xv. These illustrations include the titlepages to Volume I “Biography” and Volume II “Selections”, and Volume I, pp.1, 112.

313 *Life* 1863, I, pp. 98, 105, 241.

desire to give at least a “flavour” of the range of Blake’s work. Even this being the case, the division between vision and verse, illumination and poetry, reveals some interesting undercurrents in the way the Gilchrist collaborators thought about the later prophetic books, and has some interesting repercussions for their reproduction. If we take *Jerusalem* as example again, it would seem as if the graphics in the illuminated work become a visual language reflecting the mystical inflection of the poem. A paragraph on page 194 sets off to describe the graphic aspects of *Jerusalem*:

The subjects are vague and mystic as the poem itself. Female figures lie among waves full of reflected stars: a strange human image, with a swan’s head and wings, floats on water in a kneeling attitude, and drinks: lovers embrace in an open water-lily: an eagle-headed creature sits and contemplates the sun: serpent-women are coiled with serpents: Assyrian-looking human-visaged bulls are seen yoked to the plough or the chariot: rocks swallow or vomit forth human forms, or appear to amalgamate with them: angels cross each other over wheels of flame: and flames and hurrying figures writhe and wind among the lines. Even such slight things as these rough intersecting circles, each containing some hint of an angel: even these are made the unmistakable exponents of genius. (*Life* 1863, I, p.194)

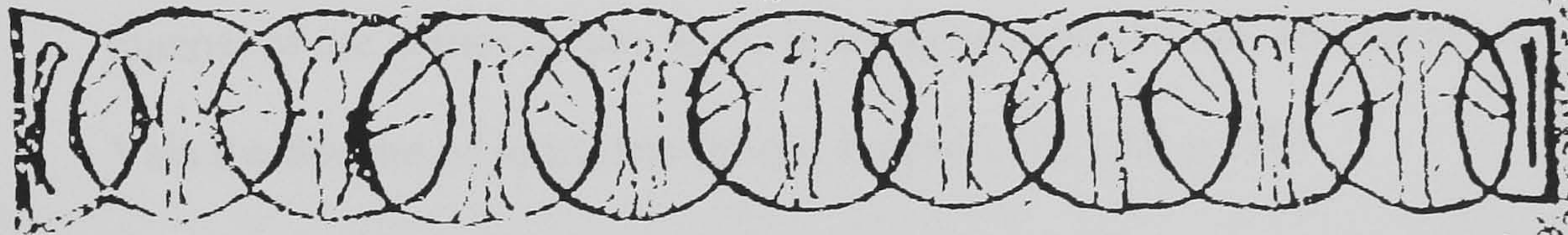
As the description progresses, “lines” of the graphics being described break up the text, and so those graphics become assimilated into the descriptive text (*figure 14*). The effect of letterpress text and graphics, broken up by the critical text that describes *Jerusalem* as “[...]empty of meaning to all but him who uttered [it]” (*Life* 1863, p.184), is a strange marriage of bibliographical integrity and deconstruction. The text is allowed to stand, but simultaneously the possibility of interpretation is dismantled. The result is

of Nature herself. The extreme breadth of the forms throughout, when seen through the medium of this colour, shows sometimes, united with its grandeur, a suavity of line which is almost Venetian.

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coiled with serpents: Assyrian-looking human-visaged bulls are seen yoked to the plough or the chariot: rocks swallow or vomit forth human forms, or appear to amalgamate with them: angels cross each other over wheels of flame: and flames and hurrying figures writhe and wind among the lines. Even such slight things as these rough intersecting circles, each containing some hint of an angel; even these



are made the unmistakable exponents of genius. Here and there some more familiar theme meets us,—the creation of Eve, or the Crucifixion; and then the thread is lost again. The whole spirit of the designs might seem well symbolized in one of the finest among them, where we see a triple-headed and triple-crowned figure bedded in rocks, from whose breast is bursting a string of youth.



figure 14

an odd mixture of blindness and insight, manifested in the bibliographical encoding of a text.

The entwining of editorial poetics with critical discourse by the Gilchrist collaborators had a knock-on effect in later critical works, particularly Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay*. In a virtuoso performance of critical, editorial and poetic interweaving, Swinburne explicates passages from *Jerusalem*, frenetically darting backwards and forwards between Blake's illuminated work, the Rossetti manuscript, Dante Gabriel's editing of the Rossetti manuscript and Swinburne's own interpretation of Blake's works:

One may fear that some such symbolic stuff as this is really at the root of the admirable poem christened by its editor with the name *Broken Love*: which I gravely suspect was meant for insertion in some fresh instalment of prophetic rhapsody by way of complement or sequel to *Jerusalem*. The whole tone of it, and especially that of some of the rejected stanzas, is exactly in the elemental manner of the scenes (where scene is none) between Albion, Jerusalem, and Vala the Spectre of Jerusalem (books 1st and 2nd). (*AS*, p.278)

Swinburne then quotes two cancelled stanzas from *Broken Love* ["My Spectre around me night & day"], supplementing the reproduction in the Rossetti selections for Gilchrist's *Life*, which did not include these deleted stanzas of Blake's manuscript poem. Erdman comments on his *Notebook* transcription that there are nine drafts of this poem in total, beginning with a fair copy (draft A) of seven stanzas, of which five, a, d, e, f, g, are given as the first, third, fifth, sixth and eighth of Erdman's text.<sup>314</sup> The two

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314 " This poem may be analysed as developing through nine drafts, the first seven on p.13, with the seventh overflowing on to p.12, and the additions and revisions on p.13 carrying the work onto the ninth.



stanzas that Swinburne opens his version with are identified by Erdman as emended stanza c3 (“Thou hast parted from my side”),<sup>315</sup> and one of the versions of cancelled stanza b, numbered firstly 3 and then re-numbered 4 in the *Notebook*, with clearly numbered lines.<sup>316</sup> After quoting the relevant stanzas Swinburne goes on to explain their textual status, combining questions of textual reproduction with critical probing: “These two stanzas (recalling so many other passages where Blake has enforced his doctrines as to the fatal tendency of the fears and jealousies, the abstinence and doubt, produced by theoretic virtue and hatched by artificial chastity) stood originally as third and fourth in the poem. They are cancelled in Blake’s own MS.; but in that MS. the poem ends as follows, in a way (I fear) conclusive as to the justice of my suggestion; I mark conjecturally, as I suppose the dialogue to stand by way of helping the reader to some glimpse of the point here and there” (*AS*, p.278). Swinburne then goes on to quote three more stanzas, two of which are not reproduced in Rossetti’s version in the selections to Gilchrist’s *Life*. The stanzas’ order is the same as in Erdman, running as the eighth (g), ninth(h) and tenth(i) stanzas.<sup>317</sup> The ninth and tenth stanzas (Erdman) are not reproduced

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In dark ink Blake wrote what we may call draft A: seven stanzas in fair copy, a b c d e f g, the first two referring to ‘My Spectre’ and ‘My Emanation’ in the third person (‘she’ in b4) but the rest addressing the Emanation directly as ‘Thou’” (*Notebook*, p.69).

315 “In a later impulse of revision, using grey ink, Blake created a new stanza b’’, made a revision in c3 (‘lover’ to ‘true love’), and numbered ten stanzas thus: a(1) b’’(2) b’ c(4) d(5) d+1(6) e(7) f(8) f-1(9) g(10) – draft D, the first draft with numbered stanzas” (*Notebook*, p.70).

316 “Blake next considered making a stanza of a3-4 and b1-2, numbering these lines ‘1 2 3 4’ in the left margin (thus restoring cancelled lines b1-2 for the moment and rejecting a1-2). During the tentative revision (not enforced by cancel lines) he also apparently considered using line b’ 1-2 in place of a3-4 (a thematic variant): he actually cancelled b’ 3-4, but next he restored all four lines of b’ by numbering them ‘1 2 3 4’” (*Notebook*, p.70).

317 “Later returning to dark ink, Blake made two successive modifications of draft D, trying d+1 as the third stanza. The first of these (draft E) rearranges, by renumbering, the middle stanzas: d+1(3) b’(4) c(5) d(6). The whole is ten stanzas. The second draft (F) reduces the whole to seven stanzas by cancelling sts. b’ and c, bypassing d, for the numbered result: a(1) b’’(2) d+1(3) e(4) f(5) f+1(6) g(7). A final step (made in different ink, dark grey but not here set off typographically) was to write a new second stanza, b’’’, cancel sts. b’’ and d+1, and restore (by numbering) sts d. and b’, for the following numbered sequence (draft G): a(1) b’’’(2) d(3) d+4 e(5) f(6) f+1(7) g(8). Blake continued, perhaps immediately, to write sts. h, i, j, on p.12, numbering them 9, 10, 11 as he went (in the same dark ink used in the final revisions on p.13). They constitute an answer by the Emanation to her male pursurer; the draft G revision inserting ‘as I’ in g4 sharpens the indication of personal dialogue and seems made in anticipation of the

in Rossetti's version, and the eighth is placed in a different order, being the penultimate stanza in Rossetti's version. In Swinburne's *William Blake*, the three stanzas lead into a single line comparing the "[...]jealous lust of power and exclusive love" with the "female will" of *Jerusalem*" (*AS*, p.279). This is followed by the quotation of two more stanzas to illustrate this point, again not reproduced in Rossetti's version. These stanzas were numbered (and perhaps written) after Erdman's draft H, numbered stanzas 12 and 11 respectively in the *Notebook*.<sup>318</sup> Swinburne reverses the order, and retains the "I" that is written over by Blake in the manuscript, in the first line of the stanza beginning "And [I – *AS*] to end they cruel mocks". Following this comes an editorial note: "This stanza ought probably to be omitted; but I retain it as being carefully numbered for insertion by Blake: though he by some evident slip of mind or pen has put it before the preceding one)" (*AS*, p.279). Next comes the stanzas in question, numbered 13 and 14 in the *Notebook* and designated l and m by Erdman (who notes that the final stanza is written in pencil).<sup>319</sup> This order is given by Swinburne, despite his reservations, thus concluding the poem in *William Blake*. The penultimate stanza is not included in Volume II of Gilchrist's *Life*, but the last stanza is the same in both Rossetti's and Swinburne's version, although Swinburne retains the opening "And", as well as refusing to assign quotation marks around the voice of the redeemer in the last line ("This is wine & this is bread"), as Rossetti does. What Swinburne has done, in effect, is to give an alternative version to Rossetti's edited poem under the guise of

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continuation on p.12. This eleven-stanza poem, before revision of j(11), we may call draft H, though in effect it constitutes simply the completion of draft G" (*Notebook*, p.70).

318 "In the same ink but with a sharpened pen, Blake next revised the pronouns of st. j(11) to give himself (or the male self) the final word, and continued it in two more stanzas, numbering them 12 and 13 (draft I)" (*Notebook*, p.70).

319 "Blake ultimately added five more stanzas, in pencil – chosen perhaps for tentativeness, perhaps thinking that pencil would do least damage to his Daphne drawing: note that he first avoided this page altogether (writing his poem on p.13) and then wrote it tidily above and below the drawing. Stanza q was undoubtedly crowded in last, but the sequence of the other four stanzas in pencil is difficult to determine: I have designated them as m n o p in the likeliest order. St. m may have been written first as a possible replacement of st. '13' and then given an introductory '&' and the number '14' to be its continuation" (*Notebook*, p.70).

hermeneutic enquiry. Swinburne ends the footnote by referring again to *Jerusalem* and then deferring to the poetic illumination that Rossetti brings to the notebook poem:

That is perfect *Jerusalem* both for style and matter. The struggle of either side for supremacy - the flight and pursuit - the vehemence and perversion - the menace and persuasion - the separate Spectre or incarnation of sex "annihilated on the rocks" of rough law or stony circumstance and necessity - the final vision of an eternity where the jealous divided loves and personal affections "born of shame and pride" shall be destroyed or absorbed in resignation of individual office and quality - all this belongs but too clearly to the huge prophetic roll. Few however will be desirous, and none will be wise, to resign for these gigantic shadows of formless and baseless fancy the splendid exposition given by the editor (p.76 of vol. ii) [i.e. D.G. Rossetti]. Seen by that new external illumination, though it be none of the author's kindling, his poem stands firm of feet and is clothed with a nearer light.(*AS*, p.279)

Swinburne uses the argument of aesthetic form, rejecting the cause of authorial intention, to vindicate Rossetti's arbitrary and non-annotated version of the notebook poem. Yet Swinburne's own inclusion of stanzas not included by Rossetti seems to suggest uneasiness with the veneer of unquestioned poetic form presented by Rossetti.

Swinburne's entwining of the bibliographical and hermeneutic in his assessment of the poem Rossetti published as *Broken Love* encompasses the textual problem of editing manuscript or notebook poetry. On the one hand is the textual form, often in a mutating and mutinous state of autograph scribbles, deletions and emendations. On the other is the need of the reader for a "clean copy", so to speak, a tight ladder of poetic form and

editorial interpretation, in which each line is a clear step on a hermeneutic path of understanding. As Dante Gabriel Rossetti himself puts it in his preface to “Poems Hitherto Unpublished”: “[T]he poems have been reclaimed, as regards the first-mentioned source [the Rossetti manuscript], from as chaotic a mass as could well be imagined; amid which it has sometimes been necessary either to omit, transpose, or combine, so as to render available what was very seldom found in a final state” (*Life* 1863, II, p.76). This seems to be a reasonable and sound statement of editorial approach when confronted by a manuscript work of jottings and half-formed, ideas side by side with half-wrought poetry. But there is a fundamental difference of approach here. On the one hand, there is the empirical materialist, the textual critic who will use a stain in various states of permeation in order to establish page order.<sup>320</sup> On the other, there is the aesthetic “salvager”, the poet-editor who re-defines and re-illuminates the artefact.

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320 “Early in my study of the Notebook I noticed that a large brown spot of something spilled (possibly aqua fortis; ink would not have been so penetrating) could be seen, dwindling in size progressively, in the leaves containing pages 1 to 4 and 15 to 20. The leaves containing pages 5 to 14 lacked this spot completely and must have been in a different location originally. And indeed it could be seen that when the ink of the poem on page 4 was still wet the book had been shut and the ink had blotted on to the facing page, not 5 but 15” (David V. Erdman, “Introduction” *Notebook*, p.3).

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Poet-Editors and Textual Critics*

Blake was at the nexus of a creative distillation between tradition and cutting edge aestheticism. The mid-century editors saw something in Blake that went beyond conventional tradition. Deborah Dorfmann sees Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne as attempting to break loose from the bounds of convention that Gilchrist placed on Blake: “Gilchrist was urging acceptance of Blake within the bounds of established taste; Rossetti and Swinburne were themselves actively engaged in shaping a new poetry and a new audience for it” (*Nineteenth Century*, pp.116 – 7). The Pre-Raphaelite editors were hypersensitive to the aesthetic uniqueness of Blake’s works, and the difficulties they presented to the ordinary reader. The Pre-Raphaelite editor of Blake is a mediator between the radical vision of Blake and the insight of the reader. Anne Gilchrist admits as much in her comments to Dante Gabriel Rossetti regarding his editorship of Blake’s work in the 1863 edition of *The Life of William Blake*: “I have received since I last wrote you the proofs of the poetical portion of Volume II, and indeed I hardly know how to speak adequately of the satisfaction and delight with which I read them: never, I think, was the task of editorship so admirably performed, *if the aim of editorship be to quicken the reader’s insight and enjoyment* [my emphasis]”.<sup>321</sup>

Blake is an extreme example in the editorial practice of the nineteenth century. Not only were the difficulties of editing and reproducing his works compounded by the unique composite art of the illuminated works. Editing his works had, for some parties, the fervour of an aesthetic project. Blake is different in this respect from other Romantic poets. Francis Palgrave, for example, saw Blake’s idiosyncrasies in grammar and

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<sup>321</sup> Letter from Anne Gilchrist to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, May 2nd 1863, (*Anne Gilchrist*, p.138).

spelling as an excuse for excessive editorial tampering.<sup>322</sup> Nineteenth-century editing of another Romantic radical, Shelley, by a bibliographer turned forger, is an embarrassing contrast to the apparent supercilious treatment of Blake by the major editors.

The main editor of Shelley's works in the period of Blake's canonisation was Harry Buxton Forman who Donald Reiman sees as one of the most objective Victorian editors of the Romantics.<sup>323</sup> Forman's critical superiority over contemporary editors was established because, unlike the poet-editors, he is first and foremost a bibliographer.<sup>324</sup> The treatment of Shelley's notebooks poems by Buxton Forman exemplifies the strenuous and exacting piecing together of textual evidence that Buxton Forman undertook as an editor.<sup>325</sup> The plain, straightforward admission of critical emendation to Shelley's text by Forman is patently laid out before the reader in his critical edition of the *Note Books of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Forman looks all over for help in deciphering the manuscript fragments, and lays out the editorial path clearly for the reader to see.

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322 F.T. Palgrave, "Letter to William Michael Rossetti, February 1869" in G.F. Palgrave, *Francis Turner Palgrave: his journals and memories of his life* (London: Longmans Green, 1889), p.116: "No one can admire more than I the taste and skill your brother showed in his corrections of Blake; but (even in that case) I still desiderate notes showing the original, and I also think a similar amount of correction in Shelley is not so admissible as it really was for Blake, who was 'super grammaticam' as well as *super* many other things".

323 Donald Reiman, "Romantic Bards and Historical Editors" in *Romantic Texts and Contexts* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), pp.109 - 29 (pp.111 - 112): "[...] Forman, fighting the influence of William Michael Rossetti and other polishers and 'improvers' of Shelley's text, was - by all standards - truer to the best authorities for the text of Shelley and Keats than were most contemporary and later editors".

324 Donald Reiman, "The Four Ages of Editing and the English Romantics" in *Romantic Texts and Contexts*, pp.85 - 108 (pp.91 - 92): "Forman, who never went to college and made his career in the Post Office while developing as an amateur scholar, nevertheless managed to establish his authority as a bibliographer and editor of the Romantics both because he took more time to be meticulously accurate than his rivals did and because, as a collector of books and manuscripts and a haunter of auction rooms, he eventually owned or examined many more original authorities than did Rossetti or any other competitor".

325 Commentary from *Note Books of Percy Bysshe Shelley, from the originals in the library of W.K. Bixby, deciphered, transcribed and edited, with a full commentary by H. Buxton Forman* (Boston: The Bibliophile Society, 1911), p.4: "This fragment has come down to us much corrupted, and is not out of danger of further corruption; but the pencilled draft which Mary Shelley seems to have had before her when she made her version will at all events help to clear the text of errors. The bulk of it is written on the first page of Note Book II, and the last 3 lines (and a foot) at the top of page 3. It was in a note on the Poems of 1817 that Mary first gave this and other fragments in her collection of 1839".

referring to patterning within the manuscript and to any external evidence which may help. Forman's edition of Shelley's notebooks appeared in 1911. By this time there was already an edition of Blake's works which took into account bibliographical practice and applied standards of textual criticism to the poems, namely John Sampson's 1905 edition of Blake's works. It could of course be argued that Forman was simply in tune with early twentieth- rather than mid nineteenth- century practice in the treatment of Shelley's notebooks, and that if Dante Gabriel Rossetti were editing Blake's notebooks in 1911, he too would apply the same standards. This may or may not be true, but, taking *The Mask of Anarchy* as an example, we can see that Forman's treatment of the manuscript in 1911 is the development of his work with the manuscript throughout the nineteenth century.

In the facsimile of Shelley's holograph manuscript of *The Mask of Anarchy*, published in 1887, Buxton is scrupulous in tracing the path of editorial expediency, even if that means having to disregard his own theories.<sup>326</sup> Even with the facsimile of the holograph published for the reader to examine for himself or herself, Forman is the consummate textual detective, combining the analytic skill of the textual editor with the interpretative sensibility of the literary critic. He is more than prepared to split hairs over a preposition at the end of stanza liv (part of the address to Freedom), which reads in the Hunt

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326 "Introduction" in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Mask of Anarchy, written on the occasion of the Massacre at Manchester: facsimile of the holograph manuscript with an introduction by H. Buxton Forman* (London: for the Shelley Society, 1887), pp.13 – 14: "In 1876 some Shelley papers preserved by Leigh Hunt came to the surface of the stream of Time which has swamped them; and in the following year, when the third Volume of my library edition of Shelley's *Poetical Works* was issued, *The Mask of Anarchy* was given from the very copy which Mrs. Shelley had written and Shelley revised with minute and scrupulous care, for Hunt to publish in *The Examiner*. Certain peculiarities in that manuscript, notably gaps left by Mrs. Shelley and afterwards filled in by Shelley, led me to surmise that the poet had dictated the poem to his wife from rough notes, such as we know he made, in ample measure, of his poetic thoughts. Until the present year (1887) the Hunt manuscript remained the sole known written authority for the text of *The Mask*; and it did not seem very probable that another authority would be discovered. Nevertheless, Shelley's own manuscript of the whole poem, less a few omitted lines, has at length been found, and has blown to the winds my theory of dictation, - the peculiarities being the result, not of hesitant instructions to an amanuensis, but of copying out, as literally as might be, a poem which was practically completed, but, required just a few finishing touches". Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Mask*, followed by page number(s).

manuscript: “For the labourer thou art bread,/ And a comely table spread/ From his daily labour come/ To a neat and happy home” (*Mask*, p.24). Forman traces the editorial history of the preposition in the last line of this stanza (“To” in the Hunt manuscript).<sup>327</sup> He takes all available information surrounding that one point of textual ambiguity and constructs possibilities of authorial intention, both from the material evidence of the holograph text, in relation to the printed version, and from the evidence of Shelley’s poetic style and political meaning. For Forman, this open interpretation of text and work is all that is permissible. He takes Hunt and Mary Shelley to task for altering Shelley’s text - for diminishing the political force of his work.<sup>328</sup>

In considering the complex textual variants in Shelley’s work, Forman allows history in. The text of Shelley’s that Forman presents to the reader is a very different artefact compared with the text of Blake’s work that Rossetti presented in 1863. In the Forman/Shelley text, the tide of history clearly leaves its sepia stains and burnished blemishes on the text. The work is being restored not rewritten. In the Rossetti/Blake text, it is not

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327 “Up to 1877, the last line was printed as

“In a neat and happy home.”

I am inclined to think I should have left it so had I then known that it stands so in the holograph, for here, though technically Shelley passed the word To for press, his hand is not traceable in the particular stanza of the final manuscript; and the preposition may have escaped his notice. The fact that lines 2, 3, and 4 are wholly unpunctuated leaves us without help to a decision. The construction is so lax with either preposition that there is not much to choose; but strictly speaking the better sense would be got from in. With to, we should have to understand that Freedom is for the labourer, bread and a comely table spread when he returns from work to a neat and happy home. This sense really leaves the neat and happy home outside the attributes of Freedom. With in, the sense is that Freedom is, for the labourer, bread and a comely table spread in a neat and happy home, when he returns from his work. This sense involves all the benefits named in the definition of Freedom. On this ground it might be well to revert to the old reading. It is obviously unlikely that Shelley meant to make a trifling change of that kind when detrimental to the sense in however small a degree” (*Mask*, pp.24 – 25).

328 “In stanza lviii (continuing the same address) there was something that looked like editorial watering-down:

“Thou art Wisdom - Freemen never  
Dream that God will damn for ever”  
said the Hunt manuscript; but Hunt printed  
“Freedom never  
Dreams that God will damn for ever”

and Mrs Shelley, while restoring *Freemen* for *Freedom*, put *doom* for *damn*. The holograph corresponds precisely with the Hunt manuscript, and leaves both editors answerable for their readings” (*Mask*, pp.25 – 26).



history but poetic form that dictates the pristine condition of the lines laid before the reader. The text is being recreated rather than restored.

It would seem as if the nineteenth-century poet-editor of Blake sees himself as part of an inspired history, drawn into a poetic encounter with the work of William Blake. The poet's experience of Blake's works is often a private, subjective affair expressed in a public manner. Objectivity between poet and critic, or poet and editor, dissolves for many of the Blake critics. Swinburne expresses the melting together of poet and critic in his writing of *William Blake: a critical essay*.<sup>329</sup> It is this sentiment of the poet-critic, and of the critical work as poem, that informs Swinburne's choice of epigraph for the 1868 edition of *William Blake: a critical essay*.<sup>330</sup> For Swinburne (via Baudelaire), the critical work is an extension of the poetic work. The poet is the catalyst for all poetic discourse, be it as writer, critic or editor. No division is recognised, no structure founded, between author and interpreter, poet and critic.

I have opened the case of the poet-editor/ poet-critic with Swinburne because his own poetic technique illuminates an aesthetic trait that has some bearing on the reception of

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329 "Coming after you and Gabriel, I wanted to do something durable also for Blake, if of less direct value than your work and his; I have for once taken the same pains in arranging and designing the parts of this essay as if I had been dealing with a poem. It is about as good a memorial now as I can make it: I have worked into it with real care, and sometimes not without much labour, all the elucidations and expressions of thought or feeling on the matter that I could put into reasonable form or coherent shape. [...]. My one main object has been to give the whole a certain dramatic order by taking each part from the point of view, and examining each detail in the light given by the personal character of Blake: in a way not yet attempted" (Letter to William Michael Rossetti, January 31st 1864" in *Swin. Letts*, p.94).

330 "Tous les grands poètes deviennent naturellement, fatalement, critiques. Je plains les poètes que guide le seul instinct: je les crois incomplets. Dans la vie spirituelle des premiers, une crise se fait infailliblement, où ils veulent raisonner leur art, découvrir les lois obscures en vertu desquelles ils ont produit, et tirer de cette étude une série de préceptes dont le but divin est l'infailibilité dans la production poétique. Il serait prodigieux qu'un critique devînt poète [*sic*], et il est impossible qu'un poète ne contienne pas un critique. - CHARLES BAUDELAIRE. This is translated as "All great poets, naturally and inevitably, become critics. I feel sorry for those poets who are guided by instinct alone: I believe them to be incomplete. In the imaginative life of the former, a point unfailingly comes when they wish to analyse their art, to discover the hidden laws by virtue of which they have written, and to draw from that study a series of precepts whose divine goal is infallibility in poetic creation. It would be miraculous for a critic to become a poet; but every poet contains a critic" (*AS*, p.1)

Blake. Swinburne was critically described in the nineteenth-century as a poet of assimilation, a siren of synthesis.<sup>331</sup> Swinburne was not the only critic of Blake who was a poet distinguished by a capacity to assimilate and synthesise. Henry Salt saw the faculty for receptivity as one of the most striking features of James Thomson's poetic style.<sup>332</sup> The boundaries of creativity and reproduction are thus presented as blurred in the avant-garde poetics of the nineteenth century. Swinburne and Thomson are presented as taking on board some particular and special essence of a poetic tradition preceding them. But this ability to assimilate is not presented as a "death of the author" scenario for either poet. Originality is emphasised. In almost the same breath that Henry Salt is declaring that Thomson's poem "[m]ight almost pass as written by Blake", he is also declaiming that "original Thomson was, if ever poet was so". That such a statement should be made both in relation to William Blake and James Thomson, and their relation to each other, directs our attention to the potential reversal in fortune in the aesthetics of assimilation. It is no longer a question of a contemporary poet absorbing the cadences and lyricism of a poetic tradition. Instead, in editing or criticising a poet's

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331 William Michael Rossetti, *Swinburne's Poems and Ballads: a criticism* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), pp.33 – 34: "This state of case can only, as far as we know, be referred to one cause - the fact that Mr Swinburne, being truly a poet, a man of imagination, penetrates, by force of imagination as well as of studentship, into the imaginative identity of the poetic models of the past time, and thence into their embodying forms. He can create for himself, as he has amply proved; but the determined set of his intellect towards art, and consequently towards literary art, possesses him with so sharp a sympathy for the literary or poetic models of highest style that, as the mood varies, he can pitch his mind into true harmonic concert with Chaucer now, and now with Dante, Sophocles, Keats, or Hugo, and sing, as it were, new vocal music to the accompaniment of these most definite, dominant, and unperishing melodies. In all the roll of poets, we certainly know none who has given such signal proof of his power to enter with re-creative, not imitative, sympathy into so many poetic models of style and form, so diverse and so high: to search their recesses, and extract their essential aroma".

332 H.S. Salt, *The Life of James Thomson* ("B.V.") (London: Reeves and Turner/ Betram Dobell, 1889), pp.316 – 317: "One of his most marked features as a student and writer was what may be called his receptivity; he absorbed and assimilated in a most singular manner the essence of what he read, so that his own references to some kindred and favourite poet (Shelley, perhaps or Blake, or Burns, or Robert Browning, or Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyam", "with that supreme Dantesque intensity of his," as Thomson himself expressed it) he seems to write unconsciously in the very tone and spirit of the author whom he had in mind [...].

He came to the desert of London town  
 Grey miles long;  
 He wandered up and he wandered down,  
 Singing a quiet song

work, the force of the present. - the contemporary voice of the poet-editor or poet-critic - may infiltrate the "original" work.

However, the strength of tradition is a powerful force for Thomson, and there is an inherent contradiction between the receptivity of Thomson the poet and the integrity of Blake the poet. Thomson inscribes Blake's poetry with personal, mysticised longing, but dedicates its presence to a national heritage:

But if the above interlineal points mark omissions, the omitted passages should be re-instated in the next edition; the whole of this Song, as it stands in Blake's earliest Volume or in manuscript, should be given at any rate in the Appendix if not in the body of the work. For this Chant belongs to the whole British people: it is one of the most precious among the precious heirlooms bequeathed to us by our forefathers; it is a national jewel of such magnificence that no one man, however honest and skilful, can be trusted to cut it and set it in accordance with his private opinion. (*Blake/Shelley*, p.110)

Although Thomson was never to edit Blake's works himself, there is a lot at stake in Thomson's criticisms of Rossetti, albeit that those criticisms are tempered by Thomson's admiration. It may seem at first that Thomson is on the same side of the Blake revival as textual critics such as R.H. Shepherd who riled against the poet-editors' liberal transcriptions of Blake's works. However, Thomson's concerns are coming from quite a different source than that "[t]he duty of an editor, in such a case as that of Blake's 'Poetical Sketches' is confined to the silent correction of obvious clerical errors, and to the rectification of faulty orthography or punctuation, due either to the lax and

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might almost pass as written by Blake, the poet to whom they refer. But such receptivity is perfectly compatible with complete originality; and original Thomson undoubtedly was, if ever poet was so".

uncertain spelling of the time, or to the ignorance and carelessness of the printer”.<sup>333</sup> Thomson’s description suggests two things about the textual transmission of Blake’s works. Firstly, Blake’s works have a status within the material history of the nation. Secondly, that material history belongs to the public, over and above the private concerns and opinions of any one individual. The emphasis upon the material nature of Blake’s works is a trait that manifests itself in one way or the other in almost all efforts at reproducing Blake in the nineteenth century. However, the emphasis upon the material takes on the various preoccupations and perspectives of those who are reproducing Blake’s works. In short the materiality of Blake’s works is reconfigured and reconstructed in the textual transmission of those works in the nineteenth century.

For James Thomson, Blake’s works are relics, which belong to a public archive of knowledge and poetry. However, Thomson’s comments on the editing of Blake’s poetry by Dante Gabriel Rossetti must be interpreted in the light of his comments on history and the *Zeitgeist* in the same essay. Blake’s works are material symbols of a poet’s thoughts, which are welded into a nation’s communal spirit. Blake’s work and poetry is part of a mystical genealogy and to break apart the work is to break the spiritual chain of a people’s history. For Thomson, Blake’s work is the spiritual heritage of the nation: “Again forty years come and go ere a few admirers worthy of him they admire can venture with much diffidence (surely but too well-founded!) to bespeak the favour of his people for this Song, in which he has added a great and burning light to their illustrations the most splendid, and for other songs in which he has given them the seed whose harvest is likely to be the wealth and spiritual subsistence of generations yet unborn” (*Blake/ Shelley*, p.111).

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<sup>333</sup> Editor's preface to William Blake, *Poetical Sketches*, ed. Richard Herne Shepherd (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1868). p.x.

In a letter written to William Michael Rossetti, Swinburne seems to share Thomson's view of Blake's works as integral symbols, their form being the material expression of a Republican ideal. Swinburne shows impressive insight in this letter with respect to the relation between textual form and political purpose

With respect to the reissue of the Prophetic Books, my reason for differing with you as to the separate critical publication of the letter-press is simply this; that this is no case of a poem by a painter with illustrations by the author which might be considered apart from the text, or merely as decorations or elucidations of it which however valuable and interesting might at pleasure be dispensed with by the student. In these books the especial note of singularity, and to me the special point of attraction, is the unity and indivisibility (as of the Republic itself) of the two forms into which as into a single mould the author has cast his thought, and fused together throughout the whole work types used to express and set it forth; so that it is no rhetorical phrase but simply an accurate statement of fact to say that the text is an integral part of the design and the design an integral part of the text. Divide them, and you kill them; at least, you mutilate and stultify them.<sup>334</sup>

The challenge facing the mid-century Blake editors and critics was how to reassert Blake's individuality within the new hermeneutic contexts that the society and politics of the time threw up. Swinburne uses the material integrity of the Blakean text to illuminate the political ideal of nineteenth-century Republicanism. Swinburne's critical faculty in this letter exhibits some of the most stunning political/textual manoeuvres to

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334 Letter to William Michael Rossetti, July 17th 1874 (*Swin. Letts.*, 2, p.311).

be seen in the nineteenth - or for that matter, twentieth -, century. At the same time that the work is presented as a core of authorial efficaciousness, Swinburne is busily setting up mirrors around the sovereign spectacle of Blake's illuminated books. So instead of simply reflecting "the two forms into which as into a single mould the author has cast his thought", the original moment of authorial intention is rethought and reconstructed in a mirror image slightly askew from the original context, but which is nonetheless a mirror image. The composite art of Blake's work and thought becomes a reflection of the Universal Republic as envisioned by nineteenth-century radicals. Swinburne plays a trump card in creating this textual/ political circle of reflection. He retains absolute fidelity to the spectacle of Blake's work, to the unity and indivisibility of the poet's thought and labour manifested on the copper plates, while at the same time injecting the potential esoterism of Blake's illuminated works with vital political meaning. And he emphasises the current political meaning of Blake's works by underlining their sovereignty of form: "[...] the text is an integral part of the design and the design an integral part of the text. Divide them, and you kill them; at least, you mutilate and stultify them". In the letter, Swinburne is pleading for a stay of execution over the unique aspects of Blake's works. At the same time, Swinburne is walking a tightrope of editorial integrity between encompassing Blake's work in an esoteric circle and bringing the relevance of Blake's work into the centre of present day social, aesthetic and political concerns.

But Swinburne, was always a practical mystic and aesthetic labourer. Like Thomson, Swinburne describes Blake's works in terms of relics. But unlike Thomson, Swinburne does not see a mystical continuum in the reception of those relics, as they are absorbed into the national imagination. Swinburne is not interested in an unbroken line of song, but in the continuous labour and power of poetic form:

Even with the already published poems there was enough work to get through; for even these had suffered much from the curiously reckless and helpless neglect of form which was natural to Blake when his main work was done and his interest in the matter prematurely wound up. Those only who have dived after the original copies can fully appreciate or apprehend with what tenderness of justice and subtlety of sense these tumbled folds have been gathered up and these ragged edges smoothed off. As much power and labour has gone to the perfect adjustment of these relics of another man's work as a meaner man could have dreamed only of expending on his own. Nor can any one thoroughly enter into the value and excellence of the thing here achieved who has not in himself the impulsive instinct of form - the exquisite desire of just and perfect work. Alike to those who seem to be above it as to those who are evidently below, such work must remain always inappreciable and inexplicable. [...]. But for all who relish work for work's sake and art for art's it will appear, as it is, simply invaluable - the one thing worth having yet not to be had at any price or by any means, except when it falls in your way by divine accident". (*AS*, pp.108 – 109)

Swinburne presents editorial interference with Blake's works as a reassertion of poetic form, a moment when labour (work for work's sake) and aestheticism (Art for Art's sake) come together in a marriage between action and ideology. Swinburne's diction in talking about restoring Blake's work serves to turn the ideology of editing into a sensuous act of preservation: "[...] with what tenderness of justice and subtlety of sense these tumbled folds have been gathered up and these ragged edges smoothed off". In Swinburne's description, the editor's task becomes not simply the tracing of a genealogy between text and author, but an act of rebuilding, an act of "power and labour" expended upon "the perfect adjustment of these relics of another man's work as

a meaner man could have dreamed only of expending on his own". The poetics of assimilation becomes an editorial technique. Alongside of this, the recreation of the text takes on an almost physical sense of the material, in which there is an "impulsive instinct of form".

Dante Gabriel Rossetti is probably the poet-editor who, more than any other Pre-Raphaelite or textual critic, set the paradigm for editing Blake in the nineteenth century. It is Rossetti Swinburne is talking about in the above passage, Rossetti, who with his artist's hands, smoothes the tumbled folds and ragged edges of Blake's works. The instinct of form would seem to be very well suited not just to a poet-editor, but to an artist-editor as well. The sensibility of the artist is certainly present when Rossetti is discussing the designs to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*: "Abundant beauty remains, even without colour; in the wealth of lovely ever-varying lines, and plentiful over-growth from the very heart of the painter, springing and clinging all round the beautiful verses. No littleness here because the scale of work is a small one. Almost any one of these pages might be painted, writing and all, on a space twenty feet high, and leave nothing to be desired as grand decorative work".<sup>335</sup> The work is elaborated upon, transformed, re-imagined.

But whether restoration or recreation is the (un)acknowledged aim of these textual critics and poet-editors, they share one thing in common. They are themselves, and they make the work of the author, undeniably part of the social dynamic and historical dialogue that Jerome McGann sees as the defining limit of authorship and literary production.<sup>336</sup> At a textual level, Blake is being defined on the one hand, as an authorial

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335 "Preface to Engraved Designs by Blake" (*Life* 1863, II, p.267).

336 "As the very term "authority" suggests, the author is taken to be - for editorial and critical purposes - the ultimate locus of a text's authority, and literary works are consequently viewed in the most personal and individual way. Furthermore, just as literary works are narrowly identified with an author, the identity



personality and on the other, assimilated into the “social relationships which gave [him his life] (including [his] “textual” [life]) in the first place, and which sustains [him] through [his] future [life] in society”. Ultimately the conflict between those nineteenth-century editors who adhered absolutely to the dictums of authorial intention and the “poet-editors” who assimilated Blake into their own aesthetic, philosophical and political concerns, marks out the division of the “objective” scholar-editor from the creative poet-editor.

The two opposed views of editing are not mutually exclusive. The struggle between textual scholarship and assimilative poetics gives Blake’s textual presence dynamic and immediate relevance in the developing literary institutions of the nineteenth century. For example, Richard Herne Shepherd, in writing against the “poet-editors” of Blake in 1874, is attempting to hammer out standards that are not just textual, but relate to cultural ownership and historical propriety:

Before closing our remarks, we must say a final word respecting the principle adopted by Mr. Rossetti in his reprint of some of these poems in the second Volume of Gilchrist’s “Life of Blake.” Once for all, while rendering due homage to his genius and rare critical perception, as well as to the great services he has rendered to the fame of Blake, we must firmly protest against the dangerous precedent he has established of tampering with his author’s text. Much ruggedness of metre and crudeness of expression he has doubtless removed or toned down by this process; but however delicately and tastefully done, we

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of the author with respect to the work is critically simplified through this process of individualisation. The result is that the dynamic social relations which always exist in literary production - the dialectic between the historically located individual author and the historically developing institutions of literary production - tends to become obscured in criticism. Authors lose their lives as they gain such critical identities, and their works suffer a similar fate by being divorced from the social relationships which gave them their lives (including their “textual” lives) in the first place, and which sustain them through their future life in society” (*Mod. Text.*, p.81).

contend that the doing of it was unwarrantable - nay, that it destroys to a certain extent the historical value of the poems. It was the growth of this mischievous system which prevented the readers of the eighteenth century from enjoying a pure text of Shakespeare; which to this day, in nine editions out of ten, gives us a corrupt and mutilated text of such writers as Bunyan, Walton, and De Foe, and which has spoilt some of the finest hymns in our language. For where is the process, once admitted as legitimate, to stop? It is not every emendator who possesses the taste and judgement of Mr. Rossetti, and in a case like the present one, where the original edition is almost inaccessible as a check, what protection has the reader against the caprice or vanity of an editor who does not adhere religiously to his author's text? Mr. Rossetti (though sanctioned by Mr. Swinburne) has no more right to alter William Blake's poems than Mr Millais would have to paint out some obnoxious detail of mediaevalism in a work of Giotto or Cimabue; or Mr Leighton to improve some flaw in the flesh-colour of Correggio.<sup>337</sup>

As if to acknowledge and at the same time reprimand the poet-editors of Blake, Shepherd includes in his edition of Blake's poems for Pickering, a poem written by himself (*Pickering Blake*, p.xv). It is however presented as a separate entity, a prelude to the work proper of Blake's poems. Shepherd's discourse on the iniquities of the Rossetti/Swinburne Blake conspiracy links the "historical value of the poems" to the material presence of an authorial text. Shepherd is here adhering to a Bowers' respectfulness towards the originality of the author's text but on McGann's textual materialist terms. The material condition of the text is open to social and cultural

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337 Richard Herne Shepherd, "Preface" in *The Poems of William Blake, Comprising Songs of Innocence and of Experience Together with Poetical Sketches and Some Copyright Poems Not in Any Other Edition* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1874), pp.xiii - xiv. Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Pickering Blake*, followed by page number(s).

discourse, which is constantly changing and reconfiguring “historical value”. The text does not hold still in history. At the same time as Shepherd is insisting on the “historical value of the poems”, his comments open the text to the vagaries of the critical freemarket, or in other words the reading public. It is the reader that makes the text historically valuable for Shepherd, the duty of the editor being to bring the reader as close as possible to the original work of the author’s hand and imagination. For Shepherd, the material presence of Blake’s works is a vital and elusive link in this chain. As Shepherd quite rightly points out, for most nineteenth-century readers (for most twentieth-century readers as well) Blake in the original is “inaccessible”.

We return to the power of the book as a material presence of nostalgia and enigma. This way of thinking is emphasised in Shepherd’s comments concerning the sanctity of visual art: “Mr Rossetti (though sanctioned by Swinburne) has no more right to alter William Blake’s poems than Mr Millais would have to paint out some obnoxious detail of mediaevalism in a work of Giotto or Cimabue; or Mr Leighton to improve some flaw in the flesh-colour of Correggio”. The material minutiae of a work of art are seen as integral to its overall presence, as in some way encoding the power of the work.

Swinburne recognises in his comments about the “indivisibility” of Blake’s works what Shepherd implicitly refers to: that poetry is not simply language but material presence. And it is in the material presence of Blake’s works that the poet-editors (and considering their creative editing of Blake’s works, there is some irony in this) stake their claim against the textual critics. I use “stake their claim” in its full meaning. The Pre-Raphaelite circle of poet-editors saw Blake as *theirs*. The lines on the page where the poet-editor and the textual critic differ become lines demarking literary property and aesthetic rights. On one side are the poet-editors, flying the Pre-Raphaelite flag and prominently featuring the Rossettis and Swinburne. On the other, are the textual critics,

coming out of a different literary school, informed by bibliographers and publishers, and mainly represented by R.H. Shepherd and William Pickering.

The Pre-Raphaelite claim to Blake verges on the predatory in some of their correspondence. In 1874 Swinburne is amazed that there can be any question of copyright as regards Blake.<sup>338</sup> The question of copyright arose at this point in the Blake revival because of William Michael Rossetti's editorship of the Aldine Edition of *The Poetical Works of William Blake* for William Bell. What is at play in Swinburne's vexation and perplexity at the question of copyright is a concern which I believe is inherited from the Romantics and which links with questions of readership as well as ownership. In this he is only the extreme point in the assumed proprietorship that the Pre-Raphaelite circle adopted towards Blake. The fierce circle of Blakean communion can be almost palpably felt in Swinburne's comment to William Michael Rossetti to "[...]ask Hotten for me if he has the proofs and M.S. of *our* Blake",<sup>339</sup> and again in January 1867, "I hope the first Volume of essays on art will be duly followed up by others. Meantime I look forward to seeing this one. I daresay before the advent of *our* Blake".<sup>340</sup> Interestingly, the "right to Blake" most often asserted by the Pre-Raphaelite circle hinges on an item of material possession, whatever the underlying claims of a secular-aesthetic correspondence between their art and Blake's. This is namely Blake's notebook, which Dante Gabriel Rossetti bought as a student.<sup>341</sup> An anecdote from

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338 "The mention of a familiar Deity [Urizen], in whose case it may be that familiarity has bred a not ill-grounded or irrational contempt, recalls that of the poet who more than any other has discerned and unmasked his real nature; and reminds me to say how glad I was to see announced your forthcoming edition of Blake - complete, said the advertisements but I scarcely expected it to include Jerusalem among the other Emanations - and how perplexed as well as vexed I am to hear of any encumbering question of copyrights. How can there be any? and in whom can they be vested at this time of day?" Letter to William Michael Rossetti, March 1st 1874" (*Swin. Letts.*, II, p.283).

339 "Letter to William Michael Rossetti, October 9th 1866" (*Swin. Letts.*, I, p.198).

340 "Letter to William Michael Rossetti, January 4th 1867" (*Swin. Letts.*, I, pp.221 - 222).

341 Kerrison Preston, *Blake and Rossetti* (London: The De La More Press, 1944), p.43: "Just before he [Dante Gabriel Rossetti] was 19 when he was still a Royal Academy student, a momentous event

Geoffrey Keynes on the editorial history of Blake confirms that Swinburne saw the notebook as a poetic generator, sparking off his own inspiration:

By chance I learnt that Swinburne had had access to it [the notebook] at some date before 1882, while it was still in Rossetti's keeping. This became apparent when I happened to acquire a half sheet of notepaper carrying a transcript in Swinburne's hand of the now well-known scatological poem beginning 'When Klopstock England Defied'. Near the end of this piece are four faintly pencilled lines which have become in the course of time so smudged and obliterated that they are now frankly illegible.<sup>342</sup>

Keynes, despite all his efforts, could not decipher the lines and was "[...]therefore delighted to find that Swinburne's transcript was complete". But, as with so much of the editorial history of Blake, there is a twist in the tale: "I should blush if I were to read you the four lines that Swinburne seemed to have rescued from oblivion, but luckily there is no call to do so. Some years later, when I was again able to examine the manuscript itself and to compare Swinburne's version with what remained of the original scribble, it became evident that he had not in fact read the lines, but invented his own lurid substitutes and greatly enjoyed himself doing so" ("On Editing Blake", p.145). In *William Blake: a critical essay*, Swinburne describes the notebook as "[...]the great source and treasure-house from which has been drawn out most of the fresh verse and all of the fresh prose here given us: and is of course among the most important

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happened. He was offered the chance, and accepted it, of buying for ten shillings the little book of 58 leaves crammed full of Blake's sketches and scribblings. Not every youth with an empty pocket would have recognised this used-up note-book as being worth ten shillings, but Rossetti must have felt a responsive thrill in him, and he borrowed the money from his brother and bought it. This 'Rossetti Manuscript' became thereupon the principal key to Blake's character and art, and has been a priceless source of information to all Blake students".

342 Sir Geoffrey Keynes, "On Editing Blake" in *English Studies Today* 3 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), pp.136 - 153 (p.145).

relics left of Blake” (AS, p.112). What Swinburne is describing is an inner sanctum of Blakeiana. The notebook, or “Rossetti manuscript”, in its original form is for certain eyes only. It is certainly a jealously guarded treasure, as William Michael Rossetti’s important letter on Blake and copyright to Anne Gilchrist illustrates:

My dear Mrs. Gilchrist,

I am not quite sure whether or not, when I had the pleasure of seeing you in May. I mentioned to you that Mr. Daldy the publisher had, about a year before then, asked me whether I wd. edit Blake’s poems for the Aldine edition. I had heard nothing more whatever about the matter until, about a month ago, the Athenæum contained a paragraph saying that I was going to do this job for Bell & Co. (late Bell & Daldy). I then wrote to Bell enquiring whether he really does entertain such a project: & the result is that I am engaged to do the work.

Bell does not want the Prophetic Books. My materials will therefore be -

1 - The Poetical Sketches

2 - Thel (this alone, as a semi-prophetic book, admitted)

3 - Songs of Innocence and Experience

4 - The poems in my brother’s M.S. book published in the *Life*

5 - The Poems, also first published in the *Life*, wh. came from the little M.S. book in your possession;

6 - A few poems from my brother’s M.S. not hitherto published, or only scattered thro’ Swinburne’s book: the chief of these wd. be The Everlasting Gospel in extenso.

7 - There may be a few outlying lyrical poems in the Prophetic Books: these I wd. include.

Nos. 1, 2, 3, & 7, are clearly not copyright: so there is no difficulty in including

them. As to the others, I myself suggested to Bell the question of copyright complications, & B. has spoken to Macmillan.

No. 4 - Macm. seems to think that, as he first *published* these poems, he has some sort of copyright claim. - B. however assures me that, as the M.S. belongs to my brother & myself, M's claim is not tenable - assuming (what is assuredly the fact) that we never transferred the copyright to him in any definite form. -

No.6 wd. fall under the same rule as 4. - These therefore would also be included.

No. 5 remains. As to this Macm. claims copyright, & I dare say rightly so. I observe that, at a date (1865 I think) later than the publication of the Life. these same poems were republished by Pickering, who then spoke of the poems as being "in *his* possession." Also Pickering's edition contains one poem (Long Tom Brown) wh. was advisedly excluded from the Life. Bell has asked me whether I cd. enquire of you whether you (to whom I had understood the M.S. book to belong when the Life was in course of publication) prefer any claim to copyright in these poems - or whether you wd. acquiesce in the statement that the copyright of them all belongs to Macm.. save the copyright of Long Tom Brown, wh. belongs to Pickering. If this view is adopted B. wd. probably succeed in effecting some arrangement with M. & P. enabling B. to reproduce the poems in his edition.

I shd. like also to consult you about Tiriél. To the best of my recollection, Tiriél is a prose-poem, written without rhyme & without regular metrical divisions - in these respects on the same footing as the Prophetic Books: & I know I used to consider it less good than most of those. If this is correct, I wd. leave it aside. If however Tiriél is a *poem* in form, in the ordinary sense of the term, I certainly think the edition wd. be all the better for including it: & you perhaps wd. be

minded to discuss with Bell terms of compensation for your copyright claim on Tiriell.<sup>343</sup>

In William Michael Rossetti's assessment of the copyright to Blake's works, it is quite clear that the publishers are the interlopers, laying claim to something that is clearly not theirs. William Michael Rossetti was embroiled in 1874 in a battle of words with Pickering over Blake and copyright. Unfortunately, I have been unable to trace Pickering's contribution to the debate, a fly-sheet enticingly entitled *William Blake and his editors*, but it is mentioned by both Deborah Dorfmann via W.M. Rossetti (*Nineteenth Century*, pp.113 –4, n.19), and G.E. Bentley also via W.M. Rossetti (*BB*, p.884). William Michael Rossetti's position can be ascertained in two articles published in *The Academy* in 1874. One is a review of the Pickering edition of *The Poems of William Blake: comprising Songs of Innocence and of Experience, together with Poetical Sketches, and some Copyright Poems not in any other edition*, edited by R.H. Shepherd.<sup>344</sup> The other is a response to Pickering's reply to the review (the aforementioned fly-sheet), printed under the correspondence column of *The Academy* in October 1874.<sup>345</sup> The debate hinges on the binary axis of possession and publication. Two Blake manuscripts are at the heart of this literary squabble. One is the Rossetti manuscript, referred to throughout this chapter. The other is the autograph notebook known as the Pickering manuscript. This manuscript was in the possession of Frederick Tatham as Gilchrist's *Life* was being completed, and he lent it to the Gilchrists.

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343 William Michael Rossetti, *Letters of William Michael Rossetti Concerning Whitman, Blake and Shelley to Anne Gilchrist and Her Son Herbert Gilchrist*, eds Clarence Ghodes and Paul Franklin Baum (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1934), pp.85 - 87.

344 William Michael Rossetti, "Review of *The Poems of William Blake: comprising Songs of Innocence and of Experience, together with Poetical Sketches and some copyright poems not in any other edition* (London: Pickering, 1874)" in *The Academy* 6 (5th September 1874), p.255. Hereafter this review will be referred to as Wm. Rossetti Sept. 1874.

345 William Michael Rossetti, "The Poems of William Blake" in *The Academy* 6 (10th October 1874), p.408. Hereafter this correspondence will be referred to as Wm. Rossetti Oct. 1874.



Subsequently Anne Gilchrist held the copyrights to those poems printed from the Pickering manuscript in the selections to Volume II of Gilchrist's *Life*. In 1864 or 1865 a bookseller had possession of it, and Pickering purchased the manuscript in 1866 (*Nineteenth Century*, p.111, n.16). William Michael Rossetti is referring at the end of his letter to Anne Gilchrist to this situation. The fact that an "interloper" might have legal copyright *and* publication right over and above the Rossettis definitely irks the Pre-Raphaelite clan. The initial review is not so much a critical assessment of editorial questions, such as selection or accuracy of textual emendations, but rather a protracted dismantling of Pickering's claim to copyright: "This is the least incomplete collection as yet in the market, but it is nevertheless far from being actually complete: a considerable number of the poems from a MS. source that were first published in Mr. Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*, are not included here" (Wm. Rossetti Sept. 1874). The authority of Blake's work, rather than belonging to Blake, (or altruistically, to the reader), is linked, via Gilchrist, to the Rossetti manuscript. As to the Pickering/ Shepherd claim to copyright poems, Rossetti slyly undermines the claim by reducing the number of copyright to two, and dismissing them as trifles: "These are misleading expressions. Of 'copyright poems not in any other edition,' there are here but two - viz., the brief and rather trifling 'Song by a Shepherd,' and 'Song by an Old Shepherd,' both of which are quite new to us: these must, we suppose, be 'the few other short pieces written in the fly-leaves,' and are not only few, but simply two" (Wm. Rossetti Sept. 1874). What develops from this point, after brushing away the two poems which are undeniably both "not in any other edition", together with the copyright of Pickering, is a rhetorical grabbing back of literary possession:

The "number of inedited autograph poems" dwindle down to one, - the one entitled "Long John Brown and Little Mary Bell;" for all the remainder to which

this term is applied by Mr. Shepherd had, before Mr. Pickering ever published them, been printed in Gilchrist's vol. ii. The same remark disposes of the assertion, "Not a few of these pieces do not appear in Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*." Those which do not appear are merely the "Long John Brown" aforesaid, and probably two or three out of the five lyrics now republished by Mr. Pickering from Blake's *Jerusalem*, his *Milton*, and his edition of Blair's *Grave*: but these five are of course not accurately referred to as "the publisher's [Pickering's] copyright." As to "Messrs. Bell's forthcoming edition," that will have to speak for itself when it makes its appearance. Precise accuracy of announcement, whether applied to a re-edition of Blake, of Shelley, or of whomsoever else, would in the long run count as an editorial virtue. (Wm. Rossetti Sept. 1874)

William Michael Rossetti's introduction of "editorial virtue" into the discussion may be the result of an underlying dilemma pricking at the surface rhetoric of his argument. William Michael was fully aware of the poetic emendations that his brother made in the "shaking up" of Blake's poetry. This becomes painfully obvious in the reply to Pickering's fly-sheet in *The Academy*, 10th October, 1874. In a remarkable *volte-face*, W.M. Rossetti denies almost any involvement in the selections or editing of the poetry for Gilchrist's *Life*: "Mr. Pickering says that the editor of his Volume, Mr. R. H. Shepherd, some years ago, 'had with some reason accused the *Messrs. Rossetti* of taking unwarrantable liberties with the text of Blake,' as published in Mr. Gilchrist's *Life* of that artist. Now there was no reason whatever for accusing 'the *Messrs. Rossetti*' of anything of the sort. I, being one of the two *Messrs. Rossetti*, had nothing at all to do with the selecting or editing of the poems of Blake in that book. (I commented on one single poem, *The Mental Traveller*)" (Wm. Rossetti Oct. 1874). But William Michael Rossetti reacts so strongly to any infringement of copyright, or suggestion that

copyright might lie outside the PreRaphaelite circle, because with ownership of copyright comes exactly that status of aesthetic guardianship.

This at first seems reasonable and logical. The Rossettis owned the manuscript of the notebook. But this position as regards Blake and copyright actually involves some startling back-tracking by the Rossettis and takes us back to the very heart of the development of copyright as an ideal. Mark Rose has traced development of copyright law as it arose and was formulated in eighteenth-century Britain. The conclusion he draws from this historical study is that copyright is part and parcel of the idea of modern authorship: "As we have seen, copyright is not a transcendent moral idea, but a specifically modern formation produced by printing technology, marketplace economics, and the classical liberal culture of possessive individualism. It is also an institution built on intellectual quicksand: the essentially religious concept of originality, the notion that certain extraordinary beings called authors conjure works out of thin air".<sup>346</sup> In tracing the court-room battles and judicial precedence set in this period Rose reaches this conclusion: "What we observe here is the simultaneous emergence in legal discourse of the proprietary author and the literary work. The concepts are bound to each other. To assert one is to imply the other, and together, like the twin suns of a binary star locked in orbit, they define the center of the modern literary system" (*Authors and Owners*, p.91). Rose goes on to extrapolate on the chain of intellectual property that lies at the heart of copyright law.<sup>347</sup> In the Pre-Raphaelite

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346 Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: the invention of copyright* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.142.

347 "Property, originality, personality: the construction of the discourse of literary property depended on a chain of deferrals. The distinctive property was said to reside in the particularity of the text – 'the same conceptions, clothed in the same words' - and this was underwritten by the notion of originality, which was in turn guaranteed by the concept of personality. The sign of personality was the distinctiveness of the human face, but this was only the material trace of the genius of the immaterial self, and this when examined dissolved completely into contingency and flux. The attempt to anchor the notion of literary property in personality suggests the need to find a transcendent signifier, a category beyond the economic to warrant and ground the circulation of literary commodities" (*Authors and Owners*, p.128).

configuration of Blake and copyright, the chain of deferral is knitted into a tight web of ownership, drawing together the creativity of the poet-editors and the originality of Blake the author. What the Pre-Raphaelites are claiming in their hold on Blake's notebook is exactly "the material trace of the genius of the immaterial self" (*Authors and Owners*, p.128). The circle of esoteric Romantic self-expression is complete in the possession of the notebook, in the reception of genius through those, like Swinburne and Rossetti, capable of recognising and appreciating it. The last barrier to the great Blake "revival" - and this must be the greatest irony of all in the history of Blake's textual transmission in the nineteenth century - is that despite the depth and insight that Swinburne brings to interpreting Blake's works, the act of publishing Blake's work is a bitter pill for Swinburne to swallow. This is part of the poet-editor's Romantic heritage, as described by Morris Eaves: "One radical conclusion to be drawn from the expressive metaphor of art is that, because the true home of the work of art is the artist's mind, any form of publication is a dangerous and unnecessary gamble apt to end in disappointment, humiliation, or even tragedy".<sup>348</sup> Swinburne and the poet-editors take the expressive theory of Romantic art further than the work as it exists in the poet's mind. They assume the mantle of Blake's poetic integrity. For Swinburne, this involves a conflation of spirit and material work. Any interpretative stripping down of the material work to reveal the spirit of work behind it, is akin to an act of blasphemy and desecration for Swinburne:

Such struggles of spirit in poets or artists have been too often made the subject of public study; nay, too often the theme of chaotic versifiers. A theme more utterly improper it is of course impossible to devise. It is just that a work-man should see all sides of his work, and labour with all his might of mind and

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<sup>348</sup> Morris Eaves, *William Blake's Theory of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p.177.

dexterity of hand to make it great and perfect: but to use up the details of the process as crude material for cruder verse - to invite spectators as to the opening of a temple, and show them the unbaked bricks and untempered mortar - to expose with immodest violence and impotent satisfaction the long revolting labours of mental abortion - this no artist will ever attempt, no craftsman ever so perform as to escape ridicule. (*AS*, p.44)

Swinburne seems to be traversing the border between insight and hypocrisy. *William Blake: a critical essay* is after all an exercise in criticism. an opening of the inner, sovereign experience of the artist to another mind, another time. another place. And in this borderline between hypocrite and sage, Swinburne's well-fought for and well-argued atheism comes crashing down. Swinburne's aestheticism cannot entirely disassociate itself from the shadow of spirit. Indeed, Swinburne's "Art for Art's sake" lives and feeds of the idea of spirit, of the regeneration of the poetic ideal in history. And in the final analysis Swinburne presents the poetic *Zeitgeist* as a sacred hierarchy. However far down the road of secular-mysticism Swinburne travels. however much he trumpets the near- arrival of the Universal Republic. Swinburne sees the *public* as blaspheming gawpers at the temple of Blake's spiritual labour. This is almost a tragic irony in one who works so hard in *William Blake* to dismantle social, moral and material hierarchies. Although Swinburne celebrates the work in *William Blake*, the material presence of labour is only a stepping stone to the action of the spirit. But it is here that the democracy of art breaks down for Swinburne.

What Swinburne labours to construct in the Blake revival is an open secret society,<sup>349</sup> whereby "[...]every corner of Blake's work is to be more or less reclaimed from chaos

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349 I would like to thank Michelle Hawley of the University of Chicago for suggesting the relevance of nineteenth century Open Secret Societies in the Blake revival.

and reduced to a cosmic state for the persevering student who desires to escape from the bondage of Bowlahoola".<sup>350</sup> But this is not the open, spontaneous communion celebrated by James Thomson. Rather it is the esoteric, enclosed culture that Thomson denigrates: "If the object of the Society be the hidden conservation and secret culture of some truth; it probably appears in the course of a not long time that instead of the truth expanding the intellects of its votaries to its breadth and greatness. they are contracting it to the measure of their own narrow littleness".<sup>351</sup> A new universe is configured in which Blake's works and mythology are the constellations, which guide the students of the new religion. The public are left outside of the universe of Blake's more esoteric works. But the irony, the gamble, at the heart of the Blake "revival" is that Blake's recognition in the Victorian period relies not on a sacred cult of adoration but on the cut and thrust of commercial publishing. Blake's survival could not be guaranteed by the enclosed pleasure of the few, but by the free engagement of the many, by ensuring that the dreaded public can materially buy into the "cosmic state" of Blake's works and "escape from the bondage of Bowlahoola". Blake's work survives because of the medium of the published book.

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350 Letter to William Michael Rossetti, December 15th 1863 (*Swin. Letts.*, I, p.90).

351 B.V. [James Thomson], "Open Secret Societies" in *National Reformer* 7 (18th and 25th February, 4th March 1866), pp.98 - 100, 117 - 118, 134 - 135 (pp.98 - 99).

## CHAPTER TEN

### *Blake and the Book: technology and religion in reproducing Blake*

The history of Blake and the book starts with the material conditions in which the illuminated books are produced. From copperplate to bound facsimile, the spiritual import and material commodity of the book predetermines the history of Blake in the nineteenth century. The socio-political rendition of Blake's works, together with the editorial patterns that emerge thenceforth, is commuted back to the material process of creating both book and facsimile.

Recent elucidation in the theory of the production as regards the illuminated books is important in relating paradigms of creativity to the spiritual and social meaning of the book. Joseph Viscomi concludes in *Blake and the Idea of the Book* that the emphasis in Blake's production of the illuminated books is upon the graphic rather than the literary, and the artisan rather than the poet. Through reconstructing and recontextualising the material conditions of Blake's production technique, Viscomi rejects the prevalent theory of transferred text (whereby a pre-existent design would be traced or charcoaled on to the copper plates).<sup>352</sup> The implication of rejecting a theory of mechanical transference in the design of the illuminated books is a shift from word to image. The theory of transferred text sees poetic language as the dominant force of Blake's

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<sup>352</sup> "Transferring sections of a poem to individual plates presupposes that a model or mock-up of the book exists, or at least a manuscript that had been cast off in order to be transferred in parts. Transferring texts implies that the decisions about entire designs (placement of text, space and shape allotted for illustrations, number of lines per page, and so on) were made before plates were executed. It implies that illuminated printing was used conventionally, to reproduce or imitate images conceived and executed in other media, instead of to produce original designs. The transfer theory's unstated presuppositions, when contrasted with actual plate and book production, reveal technical complications and contradictions that prove Blake's text could not have been transferred and that preliminary studies or models of page designs could not have pre-existed their execution" (*IB*, pp.369 – 70).

creativity.<sup>353</sup> Viscomi replaces the poet with the engraver/illustrator. With this recontextualisation of what McGann terms the original moment of textual production comes a rearrangement of the paradigms of production and reproduction in Blake's conception of the book.<sup>354</sup> Robert Essick's re-examination of Blake's commercial illustrations has also given impetus to this recontextualization of production paradigms. In recovering and cataloguing Blake's reproductive work, Essick places visual art and craft into the "high/low" model of cultural exchange: "If we take a very broad view of Blake and the book trade, we find more than financial support for his more private and important endeavours. Reproductive engraving, principally of book illustrations, was Blake's major avenue of contact not only with the world of commerce, but with the intellectual and artistic life of England".<sup>355</sup>

Once the drawing hand is removed from the page, the book becomes un-anchored from originality, and open to reproduction: "To understand the nature of Blake's various innovations requires a new continuum, the poles of which are 'reproduction' and, for lack of a better word, 'production.' At the former end are facsimiles and translations as well as original prints, since they are all copies of images invented in other media" (*IB*, pp.370 – 1). Viscomi presents us with a spectrum of productivity rather than the binaries of production/ reproduction, original/ facsimile. This "spectrality of reproduction" works to conjoin the ongoing social dialogue that creates the text with the material conditions in which Blake laboured for forty years. As Blake himself moved within and

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353 "A transferred text implies the same, that the illuminated print was an illustrated text and that Blake was working primarily as a poet who brought to the texts his skills as an artist" (*IB*, p.369).

354 "The absence of models within an autographic technique combined with an idea of invention grounded in execution made illuminated printing a mode of composing analogous to drawing as perceived and practiced by Blake. Drawing - in which invention and execution are organically intertwined, and not printmaking, in which invention precedes and predetermines execution - was the aesthetic paradigm for illuminated printing" (*IB*, p.370).

355 Robert Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations: a catalogue and study of the plates engraved by Blake after designs by other artists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.13.



between the differentials of originality and imitation inherent in the artisan production of material and aesthetic artefacts, so the reproduction of those works in the nineteenth century is not simply a translation of original into copy. For example, the reproductions of the illuminated designs for *Songs of Innocence* in the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *Life* are pulled from the original plates engraved by Blake.<sup>356</sup> If we operate only within the bipolarity of original/copy, it is very hard to assign a status to these designs in 1863. But if we think of the history of Blake's works within a spectrum of reproducibility, their manifestation becomes not only understandable and meaningful, but entirely expected.

The spectrum of reproduction is held together by what McGann calls the "social nexus" (*Mod. Text.*, p.48) of literary production. If the story of Blake and Blake's works in the nineteenth century starts with the original moment of textual production - with Blake's hand upon the copper-plate - then the [arbitrary] end-point of that story for this thesis would be the proliferation of illustrated books in the 1890s, and Blake's place within this revival. The beauty of the *fin de siècle* illustrated book is itself part of the social forces of economic and literary production.<sup>357</sup> The nineteenth century's reproduction of Blake's illuminated works is at one level a story of the struggle of labour against mechanisation. At another level, it is a story of the book as signifying unity: "a perfect book is a spiritual vehicle" (*AS*, p.205). Both the technological and the ontological concerns of the nineteenth century illuminate Blake books with new shades and shapes of cultural significance.

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356 The plates are bound into Volume II, together with the *Job* facsimiles, under the heading of "Engraved Designs by Blake". (*Life* 1863, II - there are no page numbers in this section of the *Life*).

357 Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: bitextuality in Fin-de-siècle illustrated books* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), p.41.

Technology and Blake are elastically bound in the nineteenth century, pulling apart, snapping back at each other, bending to new formations. The work of William Muir is an illustrative case. Just at the point when the mechanical reproduction of Blake's books seems a precise certainty, the artisan tradition makes a ravishing comeback in the Blake revival. William Muir appropriates the uniqueness of Blake's illuminated works and uses productive continuity within the artisan tradition as the ensign of value in his facsimiles: "My desire and intention is to reproduce ALL the important works by Wm Blake that exist in book form and also some of his finest designs and this by methods working as nearly the same as Blake himself used as the need of maintaining fidelity to his results will allow. I will not use either photography or chrome-lithography. All outlines are drawn and all colouring is by hand. I produce Fifty Copies only of each book and each of them is numbered" (*figure 15*).<sup>358</sup>

The insistence on a retrograde production technique places Muir in a very odd, not to say precarious, position. It has so far in this thesis been argued (in line with McGann) that literary works are social productions, formed by the pressures and resistances of social, economic and political discourses and forces. Paul Mann, also taking his cue from McGann, sees literary production as a "maw of commerce", which can crush and swallow those that step outside of its dictums and definitions.<sup>359</sup>

It would seem that Muir's declaration of independence from the prevailing *status quo* of technical reproducibility and commercialism would assign the Muir facsimiles to an abyss beyond the cultural margins. Richard Shepherd thought illuminated works

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358 William Muir, "Programme" to William Blake, *The Book of Thel* (London: Edmonton Press, 1885). Back cover (no page numbers).

359 Paul Mann, "Apocalypse and Recuperation: Blake and the maw of commerce" in *English Literary History* 52 (1985), pp.1 - 32 (p.9).

# PROGRAMME.

To His Serene Highness

Prince Victor Hohenlohe-Schlangenbourg Count Gleichen &c

Your Serene Highness and My kind Patron

My desire and intention is to reproduce ALL the important works by Wm Blake that exist in book form and also some of his finest designs and this by methods of working as nearly the same as Blake himself used, as the need of maintaining fidelity to his results will allow. I will not use either photography or chromo-lithography. All outlines are drawn and all the colouring is by hand. I produce Fifty Copies only of each book and each of them is numbered.

I am assisted in the work by the four Friends whose names appear at the end of the "Songs of Innocence" and I heartily acknowledge my debt to them.

I have already completed:-

The Visions of the Daughters of Albion (quarto) £3.3.0  
The Book of Thel " " " " " " £2.2.0  
The Songs of Innocence (8vo) with margins to quarto size £3.5.0

The "Visions" and "Thel" are coloured from the copies in the British Museum and "The Song of Experience" is coloured from the copy that Blake gave to Flaxman.

These have been submitted to the most fastidious critics.

I am now engaged upon

The Songs of Experience (uniform with the above) £5.5.0

The Milton " " " " " " £10.10.0

(I consider that the "Songs of Innocence" and of "Experience" is the most beautiful book that has ever been produced in England).

And I hope next to do

"Europe - a Prophecy" " " " " (folio) £14.4.0

"The Song of Los" " " " " " " £4.4.0

The "Europe" is coloured lightly. The "Los" is coloured very heavily and with Blake's peculiar vehicles.

I have to thank your highness for the interest that you have been pleased to take in this enterprise. Blake is pre-eminently an Artist's artist. He has created for himself a realm of pure Imagination in which he works alone, and his results are most stimulating to the imaginations of those who study them.

I am Your Highness' Humble servant

W. Muir.

Edmonton 1885

My only Agent is Mr Quaritch, of 15 Piccadilly.

He receives the names of Subscribers and takes payment from them on delivery

W. M.

equalled obscurity for the poet: “Nevertheless, the fame of Blake as a poet has not kept pace with his fame as an artist. His original volumes, it is true, are sold for fabulous prices, but probably more on account of the embellishments than the poetry. Certain it is that, no poet can expect to survive who depends on illustrated or illuminated editions for his celebrity” (*Pickering Blake*, p.ix). But Muir’s facsimiles were not quirks of a diminished tradition. Muir’s facsimiles were not only the *only* colour facsimiles available of many of Blake’s illuminated works until the middle of the twentieth century,<sup>360</sup> they were also profitable and well-received books at the moment of their production in the 1880s and 1890s (“Blake ... Had No Quaritch”, p.12. Table 2). In Paul Mann’s explication of the social failure of the original illuminated books lies the answer as to the failure of Blake’s books and the success of Muir’s. Firstly, Muir’s works “reveal themselves to the audience” (Mann, “Maw of Commerce”, p.9), because although they eschew the commercial mechanisation of graphic art, they do not cast themselves out from the institutions of literary production. As will become apparent in the unravelling of the history of Blake’s books in the nineteenth century, Muir’s facsimiles are part of a complex socio-economic matrix of patronage and publishing. As cited by G.E. Bentley in his comparison of Blake and Muir. Muir himself realised the importance of Bernard Quaritch as a distributor of the facsimiles (“Blake ... Had No Quaritch”, p.5, letter 2). Secondly, there is the question of what Mann terms the “ontology of production” (“Maw of Commerce”, p.9) inherent in Blake’s books. In the PROGRAMME printed at the back of a number of Muir Facsimiles, Muir addresses his patron [Prince Victor of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, Count Gleichen - cousin of Queen Victoria]:<sup>361</sup> “I have to thank your Highness for the interest you have been pleased to take in this enterprise. Blake is pre-eminently an artist’s artist. He has created for

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360 G.E. Bentley, “‘Blake ... Had No Quaritch’: the sale of William Muir’s Blake Facsimiles” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 27:2 (1993), pp.4 - 13 (p.4).

361 Keri Davies, “William Muir and the Blake Press at Edmonton, with William Muir’s letters to Kerrison Preston” in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 27:2 (1993), pp.14 - 25 (p.15).

himself a realm of 'Pure Imagination', in which he works alone. and his results are most stimulating to the imaginations of those who study them".<sup>362</sup> Muir places a clear emphasis on the "ontology of production" that distinguishes Blake. In making the simple conjunction between "Pure Imagination" and "he works alone", metaphysical creativity is aligned to a physical ontology of lone labour, of unique production. At the same time, the "ontology of production" attached to Blake is celebrated through the reproductive spectrum of which Muir's facsimiles are a part. For Paul Mann, reproductions of Blake's works are spectres of origin, creating a sacred aura around the mode of production itself: "In Blake's case, certainly, reproduction does not mark the demise of the aura; on the contrary, it produces an aura that marks the demise of the work as work. It transforms production itself into an icon. The facsimile simultaneously represents and disengages the book; it represents not only the book but its difference from the book, a difference which is not passive but actively signifies the book's absence, its iconic 'distance,' its sacred and lucrative inaccessibility" ("Maw of Commerce", p.25).

Muir capitalises on the spirituality of the book. I am in no way suggesting that this is cynicism on Muir's part. His enthusiasm for Blake's works is obviously sincere. But the Muir facsimiles are a wonderful example of the back-flow engendered when the ontology of production encounters - as it must do - the spectrum of reproducibility. It is no longer the original that generates the value of reproduction, but reproduction that creates the enticing echo of production. This iconisation of production spills over into the cultural discourse of the nineteenth century. From Carlyle, through the earliest typographic reproductions of Blake's works by Swedenborgians, such as James John Garth Wilkinson and Augustus Tulk, to the Muir facsimiles, Blake's works have carried

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362 The "Programme" is bound into most of Muir's facsimiles on the last page, or the actual binding.

the weight of spiritual as well as material value, and the reproductions of those works have been seen as a translation of material artefact into mystical correspondence. This paradigm of reproduction is more important than any straightforward assignment of graphic art or literary text as the *prime mobile* in the interpretation or reproduction of Blake in this period.

Swinburne is the Blake revivalist who has suffered most by the critical misreading of this reproductive paradigm. Joseph Viscomi comments on the “literary bias” in Swinburne’s reading of Blake:

Todd’s and Hayter’s assumption that the transferred text had to be placed on the plate before the illustration reflects a literary bias, one expressed neatly by Swinburne. Like present-day critics, Swinburne acknowledges the importance of reading the illuminated poem in its “lovely and luminous setting” (113) but quickly adds that “this decorative work is ... mere husk and shell” (113 - 114) and that “each poem [was] composed for its own sake and with its own aim, having illustrations arranged by way of frame or appended by way of ornament”(186). (*IB*. p.369)

These comments seem to define Swinburne’s hierarchy of reproduction. But they have to be placed in the context of the critical discourse of which they are part. In Swinburne’s case this is a complex discourse to explicate. The first quotation that Viscomi uses to illustrate Swinburne’s hierarchy of reproduction, indicating where the poetic is dominant, is a single line, linking a lengthy description of the visual aspects of the *Songs of Innocence* with a defence of their typographical reprint:

Nevertheless this decorative work is after all the mere husk and shell of the *Songs*. These also, we may notice, have to some extent shared the comparative popularity of the designs which serve as framework to them. They have absolutely achieved the dignity of a reprint; have had a chance before now of swimming for life; whereas most of Blake's offspring have been thrown into Lethe bound hand and foot, without hope of ever striking out in one fair effort. Perhaps on some accounts this preference has been not unreasonable. What was written for children can hardly offend men; and the obscurities and audacities of the prophet would here have been clearly out of place. It is indeed some relief to a neophyte serving in the outer courts of such an intricate and cloudy temple, to come upon this little side-chapel set about with the simplest wreaths and smelling of the fields rather than incense, where all the singing is done by clear children's voices to the briefest and least complex of tunes. (*AS*, p.113 – 4)

Swinburne simultaneously works through two things. The first is technical and professional. Swinburne is paying his dues to the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood with a nod towards Dante Gabriel Rossetti stating the poems absolutely stand apart from the “framework” of the designs in the “dignity of a reprint”. The phrase “framework” is an important indicator of the second discourse that Swinburne is engaged with at this point. As *William Blake: a critical essay* progresses, it becomes clear that the material framework of Blake's illuminated books is intrinsic to Swinburne's investigation of the spirituality of those books. It is no accident of expression that produces the extended metaphor proceeding from the description of “husk and shell” and “framework”. The metaphor is one that Swinburne will return to, and it works as a parallel to the physical layering of Swinburne's “husk and shell”.

Swinburne sets about constructing a complex architectonic metaphor of immense complexity. Blake's works are a spiritual temple, intricate and abysmal at once. There is something almost erotic and yet indistinct, unformed, in Swinburne's description of the inner sanctum of the Blakean temple. In comparison, the child-like *Songs of Innocence* are described in terms of a country chapel, with simple wreaths rather than incense. Behind the pastoral simplicity, the discourse informing Swinburne's metaphor is that of mystical correspondence, and the relation between inner and outer.

Over the next few pages Swinburne moves on to discuss the *Songs of Experience*. It is now that Swinburne's critical discourse begins to extend the metaphor of inner and outer form, reaching after the elusive core of Blake's works:

In the first part we are shown who they are who have or who deserve the gift of spiritual sight: in the second, what things there are for them to see when that gift has been given. Innocence, the quality of beasts and children, has the keenest eyes; and such eyes alone can discern and interpret the actual mysteries of experience. It is natural that the second part, dealing as it does with such things as underlie the outer forms of the first part, should rise higher and dive deeper in point of mere words. These give the distilled perfume and extracted blood of the veins in the rose-leaf, the sharp, liquid, intense spirit crushed out of the broken kernel in the fruit. (AS, p.116)

The vividness of Swinburne's critical commentary disproves a primacy of word over image. There is an explosion of sensual description as Swinburne attempts to extract the "intense spirit" from the illuminated works. The comments concerning "mere words" should be placed alongside "husk and shell" in the context of the metaphorical tenor of



spiritual insight and communion. Similarly, in relation to Viscomi's second quotation from Swinburne's *William Blake*, the immediate certainty of Viscomi's reference has to be tempered by the on-going critical discourse:

And secondly we are to recollect this; that these books are not each a set of designs with a text made by order to match, but are each a poem composed for its own sake and with its own aim, having illustrations arranged by way of frame or appended by way of ornament. On all grounds, therefore, and for all serious purpose, such notices as some of those given in this biography are actually worse than worthless. Better have done nothing than have done this and no more. All the criticism included as to the illustrative parts merely, is final and faultless, nothing missed and nothing wrong; this could not have been otherwise, the work having fallen under hands and eyes of practical taste and trained to actual knowledge, and the assertions being therefore issued by authority. So much otherwise has it fared with the books themselves, that (we are compelled in this case to say it) the clothes are all right and the body is all wrong. Passing from phrase of high accurate eulogy to the raw extracts here torn away and held up with the unhealed scars of mutilation fresh and red upon them, what is any human student to think of the poet and his praisers?(AS, p.186)

Once again, Swinburne seeks to address and redress the critical commentary and textual transmission of Blake's works that had preceded his own critical study. To balance the visual emphasis of Gilchrist's commentary upon *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in the *Life*, Swinburne swings towards the poetic value of the work. But, again, this is only the surface movement of the discourse. The actual way in which Swinburne describes the words of the poem is charged with a primordial sense of disorientation: "If any one

would realize to himself for ever a material notion of chaos, let him take a blind header into the midst of the whirling foam and rolling weed of this sea of words". He goes on to describe that "sea of words" in a profusion of gargantuan, oceanic terms, traversing both the visual and the poetic, the temporal and the spatial: "This poetry has the huge various monotonies, the fervent and fluent colours, the vast limits, the fresh sonorous strength, the certain confusion and tumultuous law, the sense of windy and weltering space, the intense refraction of shadow or light, the crowded life and inanimate intricacy, the patience and passion of the sea". For Swinburne, there seems to be both agony and ecstasy in the interpretation of the "[...] inspired matter, of absolute imaginative truth and eternal import" (*AS*, pp.185 - 7), that constitutes Blake's prophetic books. It is in this terrain of confusion that Swinburne's description of the illuminated books as poetic body and visual clothes becomes much more far-reaching than a simple passing metaphor. The idea of the material form of the book as "clothing" the "eternal import" of the spiritual work has a direct antecedent in Thomas Carlyle's work on the cultural symbol, and, in turn, Carlyle had a direct influence on the 1860s' Blake enthusiasts.

Alexander Gilchrist wrote in his diary about Thomas Carlyle's influence upon the execution and conception of *The Life of William Blake*:

[From Alexander Gilchrist's diary, dated 28th December 1859]

Carlyle again asked me about the *Blake*; what I was doing with it. I stated that I had delivered his letter to Chapman, but was giving my MS. a last revisal before sending it in. He talked of the difficulties of a book, of getting it done, of reducing chaos to order.<sup>363</sup>

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363 From Alexander Gilchrist's diary, 28th December 1859 (*Anne Gilchrist*, p.74).

For Carlyle the book is the symbol that holds together the “chaos” of a text. The book is a signature of order, an assimilation of information that is open to reading and interpretation. Thomas Carlyle’s theory of the symbol and of the book in *Sartor Resartus* (1831) offers the most explicit expression of the book as cultural symbol in the period immediately proceeding Blake’s death. The structure of *Sartor Resartus* is configured around the rebuilding of a cultural artefact. This cultural artefact is the book of Teufelsdröckh’s (or devilsdung’s) life, pieced together from the contents of paper bags, each marked with the sign of the zodiac. The cultural artefact, the material symbol, is recreated as we read. Hazard Adams explains what this means for Carlyle’s theory of symbols thus: “For Teufelsdröckh, culture is itself symbolic. He seems finally to see man unclothed as incomplete, uncreated, only a potentiality. His reality is in the making” (*Lit. Sym.*, p.87). The difference between mystical correspondence and Carlyle’s cultural symbol is located in the cultural regeneration of the symbolic. Religion and the sacred are not completely jettisoned in Carlyle’s schema of symbolism, to be replaced by the symbols of secular culture. But sacred symbols are described as mutable artefacts, open to mutation and degeneration:

Highest of all Symbols are those wherein the Artist or Poet has risen into Prophet, and all men can recognise a present God, and worship the same: I mean religious Symbols. Various enough have been such religious Symbols, what we call *Religions*; as men stood in this stage of culture or the other, and could worse or better body-forth the Godlike: some Symbols with a transient intrinsic worth; many with only an extrinsic. (*Sar. etc.*, p.137)

Blake and Carlyle concur in the cultural value of the Poet as a Prophet within human history. In his "Annotations to Watson" Blake describes Biblical history in terms of an arbitrary creativity, as works of the imagination rather than as the word of God: "He who writes things for true which none could write. but the actor. such are most of the acts of Moses. must either be the actor or a fable writer or a liar. If Moses did not write the history of his acts. it takes away the authority altogether it ceases to be history & becomes a Poem of probable impossibilities fabricated for pleasure as moderns say but I say by Inspiration" (E616). What Carlyle and Blake recognise is the author's *social* volition in creating symbols, particularly the cultural symbol of the book. God is not the creative impetus behind all symbolism. Human beings create society, their own secular version of the mystical universe where correspondence holds sway. In a letter that Carlyle writes to James John Garth Wilkinson concerning Swedenborg, the importance of the book as a vehicle for correspondence, not only between people but also between ages, is apparent:

The book of Swedenborg's which you have translated anew, I read carefully in the old version received from you long ago. The impression it left was, and is, very strange. In his feeling about the *moral essence* of things, properly the core of his own being, I almost altogether and emphatically agreed with him. It was clear, too, that he was a man of robust, nay, you would have said cold, hard, practical-looking understanding: how such a man should have shaped for himself, into quiet historical concretions, standing there palpable, visible, solid and composed as the mountain rocks or more so, spiritual objects which eye hath not seen nor ear heard; this is what I cannot at all put together.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Letter from Thomas Carlyle to J.J. Garth Wilkinson, 3rd October 1839, quoted from a letter to Garth Wilkinson's fiancée in *James John Garth Wilkinson*, pp.35 - 36.

For Carlyle, Swedenborg makes the spiritual world “palpable, visible, solid and composed”. In short, Carlyle sees Swedenborg as “shaping” symbols of the spiritual world in the midst of human history. The phrase “quiet historical concretions” echoes the silent regeneration of the sacred in and through cultural history. The book is a literary vehicle for such regeneration of mystical correspondence.

The power of the book as a cultural symbol can be palpably felt in Wilkinson’s preface to his own work *The Human Body*. In this popular book upon physiology, textual transmission becomes a symbolic labour that preserves a communal literature. In using the phrase symbolic labour I am led by both Carlyle and Wilkinson, who both describe the creation of a book as something more than physical, something beyond the creation of a material object. The materiality of life is “clothed” by work which creates symbolic meanings and cultural values: “Teufelsdröckh even claims that those ages that prize symbolic worth are the greatest ages, and he obviously equates the drive to symbolise - to clothe - with cultural growth. It is no surprise that the literal-minded editor is confused about the substantiality of clothes” (*Lit. Sym.*, p.86). Wilkinson uses exactly the same metaphor of clothing to describe the “glorious new art” of printing:

The means of making the poor man a proprietor of books, lay in a glorious new art that clothed all literature in a bodily frame of surpassing beauty and usefulness, and placed it in the hands of the common people in a form that before the invention of printing the greatest kings would have envied; and which even Virgil and Cicero would not have disdained as the material pedestal of their immortality. This art, simpler and more universal than writing, was not lower,

but immeasurably higher than its predecessor, whose services were for the noble and learned.<sup>365</sup>

Wilkinson celebrates the art of printing as a popularising force of literary communion. The book, particularly the printed book, creates an open circle of reading communities and the book becomes the material symbol of those communities. But Wilkinson's wholesale celebration of print technology and mass reproduction marks a radical departure from Blake's own thoughts on these matters. In the *Public Address on Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims*, Blake dismantles the art and business of reproduction: "Englishmen rouze yourselves from the fatal Slumber into which Booksellers & Trading Dealers have thrown you Under the artfully propagated pretence that a Translation or a Copy of any kind can be as honourable to a Nation as An Original, [Belying] Be-lying the English Character in that well known Saying Englishmen Improve what others Invent[.] [...] No Man Can Improve An Original Invention"(PA, p.60, E576). What underlies the difference between Blake and Wilkinson is a conflict of, and concerning, the book as a medium of ideology. The conflict between Wilkinson and Blake does not rest so much on the ideas encapsulated within their respective ideologies. It is rather how those ideologies are encapsulated, how those ideologies are symbolised and communicated. The way in which Wilkinson configures the book, and the way in which this differs from Blake's idea of the book, hits into a rich vein of cultural symbolism and its historical development. In this comparison, Blake comes across as the man ahead of his time, insightful as to the ways in which culture not only forms symbols out of history, but constricts and delimits those symbols.

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365 James John Garth Wilkinson, *The Human Body and its Connexion with Man: illustrated by the principal organs* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851), pp.xii - xiii. This book reproduces Blake's poem "The Human Form Divine".

However, there is a contradiction between Wilkinson's criticism of Blake and Wilkinson's theories on reading communities within the social world, such as stated in the preface to *The Human Body*. For Wilkinson, the manifestation of Blake's visionary imagination within human society and history does not produce a translucent or openly readable symbolism:

Yet he, who professed as a doctrine, that the visionary form of thought was higher than the rational one; for whom the common earth teemed with millions of otherwise invisible creatures; who naturalized the spiritual, instead of spiritualizing the natural; was likely, even in these, his noblest Works, to prefer seeing Truth under the loose garments of Typical, or even Mythologic Representation, rather than in the Divine-Human Embodiment of Christianity. And accordingly, his Imagination, self-divorced from a Reason which might have elevated and chastened it, and necessarily spurning the Scientific daylight and material Realism of the nineteenth century, found a home in the ruins of Ancient and consummated Churches; and imbued itself with the superficial obscurity and ghastliness, far more than with the inward grandeur of primeval Times. (*Wilkinson Blake*, pp.xvi – xvii)

Wilkinson accuses Blake of a false idolatry in his works. The comments in the above passage seem to throw Wilkinson's assignment of mysticism as a social and historical force into considerable, and possibly irreconcilable, contradiction and confusion. Instead of reading Blake's "Mythologic Representation", or mythic archetypes, in the vein that Mircea Eliade would, as keys to a "transconsciousness"<sup>366</sup>, Wilkinson takes Blake to task for ignoring Reason and "the inward grandeur of primeval Time".

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<sup>366</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: studies in religious symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Harvill Press, 1961), p.37.

Wilkinson's criticism of Blake on this point is remarkably close to Hegel's criticism of what he describes as Symbolic art: "As indeterminate it does not yet possess in itself that individuality which the Ideal demands; its abstractness and one-sidedness leave its shape to be outwardly bizarre and defective. [...] In general terms we may call this form the *Symbolic* form of art. In it the abstract Idea has its outward shape external to itself in natural sensuous matter, with which the process of shaping begins, and from which, qua outward expression, it is inseparable".<sup>367</sup> The descriptions in Hegel's *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* of symbolic art, and in Wilkinson's preface to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* of Blake's "mythologic representation", both evoke a Gothic asymmetry in their criticism. The "bizarre and defective" in Hegel's symbolic art is the "ghastliness and obscurity" of Blake's "ruins of Ancient and consummated churches" in Wilkinson's preface. What unites the admittedly extremely different writings of Hegel and Wilkinson is the drive towards a totalising abstraction. This is what marks Wilkinson out as a post-Romantic rather than a Romantic. This is what separates Wilkinson's social concerns and awareness of cultural history from Coleridge's. Correspondence in Wilkinson's writings is not translated as a Coleridgean "translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal". Wilkinson is not concerned with the translucence of the symbol. Wilkinson, is quite different from the Romantic Coleridge. Wilkinson, to put it bluntly, is an ideologue. He shares with Hegel the need to internalise the Ideal, to create an abstract Universe of idealised forms. If, as McGann tells us "[...]Hegel's theory, speculative and total, represents the transformation of Romanticism into accultured forms, into state ideology"<sup>368</sup>, then Wilkinson's theory represents the transformation of mysticism into politico-aesthetic ideology. This is in direct opposition to Blake's diatribe against "The wretched State of the Arts in this

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367 G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet and ed. Michael Inwood (London: Penguin, 1993), p.82. Bosanquet's translation was first published in 1886.

368 Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: a critical investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.48.



Country & in Europe originating in the wretched State of Political Science which is the Science of Sciences Demands a firm & determinate conduct on the part of Artists to Resist the Contemptible Counter Arts” (*PA*, p.20, E580). The Chinese box effect that Blake sets up regarding “Political Science, which is the Science of Sciences”, clearly illuminates his distrust of ideological systems that serve to close up and stagnate the process of contraction and expansion essential to the regeneration of the cultural symbol and the universal self. Wilkinson misread Blake as regards the question of correspondence and poetic representation:

For the true Inward is one and identical, and if Blake had been disposed to see it, he would have found that it was still (though doubtless under a multitude of wrappages) extant in the present Age. On the contrary, copying the outward form of the Past, he has delivered to us a multitude of new Hieroglyphics, which contain no presumable reconditeness of meaning, and which we are obliged to account for, simply by the Artist’s having yielded himself up, more thoroughly than other men *will* do, to those fantastic impulses which are common to all mankind; and which saner people subjugate, but cannot exterminate. (*Wilkinson Blake*, pp.xvii – xix)

Wilkinson’s misreading is important. As has been demonstrated amply by critics since Wilkinson, Blake’s works do have both mystical and socio-political referents and meaning. But it is in the first few lines of the quoted passage that Wilkinson betrays how off-key his reading of Blake is. When Wilkinson says “the true Inward is one and identical”, he is describing the Swedenborgian doctrine of correspondence and influx of the spirit. He configures this doctrine as internalised and idealised. In Wilkinson’s order of things, there is one interior which should not be corrupted by a multitude of new

Hieroglyphics” or “wildness and fierce vagary”. Blake’s interpretation of correspondence and influx entails a far more fluid and open construction:

What is Above is Within, for every-thing in Eternity is translucent:

The Circumference is Within: Without is formed the Selfish Center

And the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity.

And the Center has Eternal States! the States we now explore.

(*Jer* 71:6 – 9, E225)

In Blake, unlike Wilkinson, there is no idea of a static homogeneous one, which is identical and ideal. Wilkinson sees Artistic or Poetic works as produced through metaphysical creativity. In Swedenborgian terms this is designated as the inspired influx of the Imagination. His concern is with how this creativity manifests itself within the epistemological paradigms of a modern society. Unlike Coleridge, Wilkinson’s quarrel with Blake does not centre on his rejection of nature as a fit object for the imagination. It centres on Blake’s regression (as Wilkinson sees it) into the false symbolism of the Past, in Blake’s refusal to “subjugate” his fantastic impulses to the religious absolutism of Swedenborgianism. Wilkinson provides us with an interesting take on Mark Schorer’s argument concerning what happens when the metaphysical superstructure of mysticism is inverted. Instead of finding redemption in nature, Wilkinson finds regeneration in the reorganisation of mystical dogma. The aesthetic regeneration of the doctrine of correspondence can be seen in Wilkinson’s own collection of poetry, *Improvisations from the Spirit*. Wilkinson initially seems to present himself as he presents Blake: as an anachronism. He explicitly removes his work from the marketplace of literature: “This little volume, which I neither value, nor undervalue, is one man’s earliest essay, to receive with upstretched palms some of these long-travelling,

most-unnoticed, and yet unchangeable and immortal rays".<sup>369</sup> The work that he "neither values nor undervalues" is presented as outside of an economic remit.

For Wilkinson, textual criticism is a matter of interpreting rightly divine revelation, or spiritual correspondence: "It was given just as the reader reads it: with no hesitation; without the correction of one word from beginning to end: and how much it differs from other similar collections *in process*, it were difficult to convey to the reader. Suffice it to say, that every piece was produced without premeditation or pre-conception: had these processes stolen in, such production would have been impossible" (*Improvisations*, p.403). The Poems will be read by readers, but will be objects of spiritual love to Swedenborgians: "Many of the Poems are written by Correspondences, as Swedenborg terms the relations which natural objects bear to spiritual life; or to varieties of Love, which is the grand object of all. Hence it is the readers of Swedenborg who will best understand this class of Poems" (*Improvisation*, p.404). The book becomes a symbolic embodiment of speech and writing, text and audience, authority and amanuensis, *poesis* and *mimesis*. But the irony is that Wilkinson's nonchalance about the value of "this little volume" actually highlights the fact that this spiritual experience is not a Carlylean regeneration of the spirit through cultural symbolism. It is a reorganisation, in an economically defined literary world, of religious ideology. This takes on connotations that are more serious when Wilkinson's religious ideology seeps into the socio-political arena, unmediated by a secular sense of freedom from religious dogma. Wilkinson's book, *The African and the True Christian Religion, His Magna Carta: a study in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg*, contains correspondence of a more literal type, which emphasises the immediacy of the political and social in this text. The text of Swedenborg's diary is translated into a doctrine that has definite social and political

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369 James John Garth Wilkinson, *Improvisations from the Spirit* (London: W. White, 1857), p.403.

connotations. Wilkinson suggests, with all the rampant naivety of a religious ideologue, that the solution to racial oppression in the United States of America would be for Afro-Americans to return to Africa as members of the Swedenborgian Church. Swedenborg becomes the present voice for Africans: “The Diary which we are translating from was written down often during the spiritual experiences which Swedenborg was undergoing. In passages the Word now imports the moment of writing, and the Africans here instruct him, and desire to make their statement through him. No such opportunity of a man in both worlds, writing on the instant for both, had occurred before. This Diary is in one sense the Drama of his inner life, and the *dramatis personae* are of all Ages from Adam to Swedenborg, and of all the three realms, the World of Spirits, Heaven and Hell. It is an Archive Book, and its day will come”.<sup>370</sup> The dedication to Edward W.H. Blyden as an “eminent Representative of your Race” (*The African*, p.v), at the beginning of the book is mirrored by the printed letter of Blyden’s reply at the end of the book (*The African*, pp.243 – 5). This correspondence, discussing the social merits of Swedenborgianism as compared to Islam, is a pointed example of the socio-political dynamics of textual reproduction. It also shows how the book transfigures social and political discourse into literary and symbolic discourse. Wilkinson fuses the historical and the theological in the “archive book”. This gives the spiritual doctrine of correspondence a social and political relevance and significance within human history. The Archive Book is the material symbol of that significance.

What has happened in Wilkinson’s thought is remarkable. A full circle has been drawn from the Carlylean celebration of the book as cultural symbol, through the criticism of Blake’s “Mythologic Representation”, back to the book as an “Archive” of human knowledge. However, despite Wilkinson’s “modernisation” of Swedenborgian belief,

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370 James John Garth Wilkinson, *The African and the True Christian Religion, His Magna Carta: a study in the writing of Emanuel Swedenborg* (London: James Speirs, 1892), p.36.

this view remains religiously and materially dogmatic and anachronistic. Compare Wilkinson's opinion on Swedenborg and the Archive book with Blake's cutting views on Swedenborg and the book: "Thus Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new; tho' it is only the Contents or Index of already publish'd books. A man carried a monkey about for shew, & because he was a little wiser than the monkey, grew vain, and conceiv'd himself as much wiser than seven men. It is so with Swedenborg: he shews the folly of churches & exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious. & himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net. Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth: Now hear another: he has written all the old falshoods" (*MHH* 21 – 22, E43). The symbolic investment in the material artefact invites scepticism. Blake's scepticism of Swedenborg is mirrored in James Thomson's cynicism concerning Wilkinson. James Thomson sees the subjugation of mystical metaphysics in a material universe, such as a book, as the creation of empty ciphers:

But the strangest thing to note in such truly devout and wise men as Swedenborg and Wilkinson, who so bitterly denounce and ruthlessly punish lack of faith in others, however splendid their genius, however beneficent their lives, and who so ardently proclaim their own faith in ever-flowing, all-vivifying Divine Influx through every world and order of the Universe, is their utter want of faith in believing that their God's last word is locked up in a series of obscure and incongruous pamphlets, written no one knows when or by whom, coherent solely by aid of the bookbinder; containing doubtless many noble and wise things, as all antique literatures do, but containing also things (not the less sacred) most absurd, most vile, most detestable.<sup>371</sup>

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371 James Thomson, "B.V.", "A Strange Book" in *Biographical and Critical Studies* (London: Reeves and Turner/ Betram Dobell, 1896), pp.298 – 371 (p.347).

Thomson's satirical attack is upon the absurdity of basing ontology or theology on material artefacts that have become corrupted in time and displaced from the original contexts that gave them a meaning in the first place. In literary descriptions of the book throughout the nineteenth century, there is a constant conflict and paradox between the dead language of "obscure and incongruous pamphlets" and the living symbol of the book. What distinguishes and unites Blake's and Thomson's interpretation of mysticism and mystic texts is the rejection of any kind of religious orthodoxy concerning the validity of individual interpretation.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the avant-garde dissenters belonging to the new religion of Aestheticism were finding that the simple assertion of individual interpretation did not free them from the material presence of the book. On the contrary, the internalisation of experience served to trap the aesthete within the symbolism of the material text, grown opaque with the abstractions of a secular world. These tensions culminate in the decadent literature of the *fin de siècle*. Starting from the point of Romantic philology, Linda Dowling traces the development of the "fatal book" in the decadent literature of the late nineteenth century. In a work such as Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams* (composed 1895-1897, published 1907), there is an aesthetic transformation of the body of the book and the body of the person.<sup>372</sup> They become ritually intertwined into a secular symbol of solipsistic worship (*Language and Decadence*, pp.154 – 60). The book has become fetishised. But so has the investment of Personality within the book:

The dark and troubling vision of the fatal book as it was to haunt fin de siècle writing, then, originates in that profane "soul in style" that Pater could never

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372 Arthur Machen, *The Hill of Dreams* (London: Richards, 1954) quoted in Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.154.

quite free from the sensuous materiality of language, and that thus becomes itself the ghost of linguistic materiality. Like the “dark angel” of Lionel Johnson’s famous poem, it is the false companion, the “dark Paraclete” - is, in short, the unholy spirit or inverted logos known by its “whisper in the gloom,/The hinting tone, the haunting laugh.” This stylistic effect of “intense personality” unconsecrated by ideality is what George Moore read as a seducing presence in the works of Gautier and Pater, a counterspirit that inhabited certain poisonous books. (*Langauge and Decadence*. pp.169 – 70)

Here is a material labyrinth of symbols instead of an uninterrupted influx between physical reality and metaphysical ideality. The correspondence that creates the symbolism of the “fatal book” is, to borrow Dowling’s phrase, “unconsecrated by ideality”. The book is a maze of the “sensuous materiality of language”. These material symbols are “fatally” disconnected from Coleridge’s ideal of the “translucence of the Special in the Individual”. There is a displaced symbolism at work here. The linguistic materiality of the book leads the reader into blind alleys of symbolism. The aesthetic synthesis of body and book is an empty cipher of “Personality”. Personality in this sense is a degenerative symbol of human agency. The human author has become a narcissistic aesthete, creating a solipsistic world of symbolism. The book has become the embodiment of soul designated only by style. The living symbol has become dead language. This is Thomson’s complaint against Wilkinson, and Blake’s complaint against Swedenborg. The tragedy of a book such as the afore-mentioned Arthur Machen’s *Hill of Dreams* is the fatalism of its self-knowing parody. Dowling sees the rise of the fatal book within Aestheticism as growing out of an aesthetic consciousness concerning the “post-philological moment”: “[...] Swinburne, too, self-consciously writes in the post-philological moment [...] embrac[ing] song as the only adequate

remaining model for literary language in the aftermath of the subversion by scientific philology of the written tradition” (*Language and Decadence*, pp.125 – 6). Philology is a secular science which cannot completely disentangle itself from the religion, the Biblical tradition, which it rejects and replaces. An aesthetic struggle ensues about, and within, language and the embodiment of language. M.K. Louis describes the important ambiguity of the Word in Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon*: “‘Word’ in this sense is the opposite of the Logos (the Word which is life and God, John 1.1 - 4) and of the Gospel (the good news that Christ has died to give us life). And as the Logos represents that reasonable order which in Stoic thought is the essential structure of the universe, this anti-Logos represents the disorder and incoherence which constitute the real structure of the world (or so Swinburne seems to assume at this point)”.<sup>373</sup> As Linda Dowling points out, there is an apocalyptic tone to “the anti-Logos” with its “disorder and incoherence”. The aesthetic project which sought to examine language and its symbolism in relation to profane humanity became a fevered quest: “The search for a substitute logos, for a new ‘volume paramount’ expressive of the post-philological moment, was to be hectically pursued in the fin de siècle. [...] Mallarmé said that the age sought to bring forth a ‘sacred book’” (*Language and Decadence*, p.173).

If we wind the story of nineteenth-century aesthetics backwards from the fin de siècle, the troubling consciousness of language as arbitrary structure, which haunts Decadent writing, is tempered with a sense of language as mystical and active. This is particularly true of Swinburne. In Swinburne’s own poetic writing, and in his idea and practice of editing, correspondence and analogy figure greatly. It allows the poet and artist to invent within the tradition that they cannot escape. At the same time, it refers that creativity not to the preceding tradition, and certainly not to any material or

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373 M.K. Louis, “Wise Words and Wild Words: the problem of language in Swinburne’s *Atalanta*” in *Victorian Poetry* 25:1 (1987), pp.45 - 54 (p.54).



bibliographic genealogy. The inference is always of a metaphysical creativity, of “the choir invisible” beyond the material manifestation of the work. In part, this is why Swinburne is such an insightful critic of Blake. Mark Schorer states the dynamics of mysticism simply: “Mysticism is active, only secondarily speculative” (*Politics of Vision*, p.50). Blake insists that in the creative correspondence, which is his vision, there is *action*: “I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action” (*VJL*, p.95, E565). When Swinburne discusses what sort of criticism would enable Blake’s work to come alive, he alights on Balzac and his “Swedenborgian researches”. In Swinburne’s discussion of Blake and Balzac, the drive is always towards an active, creative criticism, in which language comes alive and is “instantly perceptible”:

The incomparable power of condensing apparent vapour into tangible and malleable form, of helping us to handle air and measure mist, which is so instantly perceptible whenever Balzac begins to open up any intricate point of physical or moral speculation, would here have been beyond price. He alone who could push analysis to the verge of creation, and with his marvellous clearness of eye and strength of hand turn discovery almost to invention. (*AS*, p.102)

The poet-critic writing in “inventive prose”, pushing “analysis to the verge of creation”, turning “discovery almost to invention”, is crucially important for the aesthetics of the Blake revivalists. For Swinburne, Balzac forms a critical correspondence with the intangible world of metaphysical creativity. His criticism is a poetic action, which makes this creativity tangible and perceptible. For the nineteenth-century Blake critics, particularly those involved in the 1863 edition of *The Life of William Blake*, the book is

the vehicle for the semi-poetic, semi-mystical activity of profane criticism. Two things which clearly mark out the Blake revival from the pessimism of Decadent literature's fatal book is their utter enthusiasm for the book. Their bristling descriptions of the book are filled with currents of vitality and potentiality. A brief overview of Anne Gilchrist's and Samuel Palmer's relationship with books, and with Gilchrist's *Life* in particular, will serve to illustrate this.

Anne Gilchrist's vision of what a book is, how a book may mean and convey meaning, is at the heart of her correspondence with Walt Whitman:

[...] & the Book that is so dear - my life-giving treasure [...].

Your book does indeed say all - book that is not a book, for the first time a man complete, godlike, august, standing revealed the only way possible [...].<sup>374</sup>

Anne Gilchrist is not alone in her equation of life and books. Samuel Palmer writes to Anne Gilchrist on June 27th 1862:

The copy [of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*] I saw was highly finished.

Blake had worked so much and illuminated so richly, that even the type seemed as if done by hand.

The ever-fluctuating colour; the spectral pigmies rolling, flying, leaping among the letters; the ripe bloom of quiet corners; the living light and bursts of flame; the spires and tongues of fire, vibrating with the full prism, made the page seem to move and quiver within its boundaries; and you lay the book down tenderly.

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<sup>374</sup> Anne Gilchrist to Walt Whitman, 4th July 1874 and 27th November 1871 in *The Letters of Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman*, ed. Thomas B. Harned (London: T. Fisher, [1920]) pp.112 and 68 respectively.

as if you had been handling something which was alive. As a picture has been said to be something between a thing and a thought, so, in some of these type books over which Blake had long brooded with his brooding fire, the very paper seems to come to life as you gaze upon it - not with a mortal but an indestructible life, whether for good or evil.<sup>375</sup>

Palmer seems to be suggesting a metaphysics of the book that takes precedent over any idea of the book as being organised by genre or type. In an undated letter to Alexander Gilchrist, Palmer compares a book to conscience: "What a wonderful thing is a good book - next to a clear conscience, the most precious thing life has to offer".<sup>376</sup> Yet, the idea of the book that Palmer postulates also refuses to give up the physical presence of the book. In the first extract concerning *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he talks of the page moving and quivering, of "the very paper", which "seems to come to life as you gaze upon it". The following lines precede the second extract, which compares a book to conscience: "As for Ovid, he is the quintessence of poetry, as your copy is the quintessence of editions. What a text! What a margin! They did not clip the book edges then to make those shreds up into paper again" (*Anne Gilchrist*, p.58). Palmer's sense of the material life of the book is extremely provocative. This is his reaction upon first reading the 1863 edition of *The Life of William Blake*. Palmer starts his "[...] beautiful and enthusiastic letter" with the material presence of the book. He talks of waiting in anticipation for the paper knife so that he could "[...] cut the first volume, and read wildly everywhere". From here he quickly ascends through the authorial organisation of the book - "the dear Author and the Editor, - Mr. Linton, the Publisher and Printer" - to a metaphorical representation of the book - "not a pearl thrown to the swinish many, but

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375 A.H. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer, Painter & Etcher* (London: Seeley & Co. Ltd., 1892), p.243.

376 Samuel Palmer, quoted in *Anne Gilchrist* p.58.

a tiara of jewels". From this point, there is an oscillation between metaphors that represent the book as a live, organic structure, the electric eel for example, and metaphors that represent the book as static, inorganic structure, the *imperishable monument* for example. The point at which these metaphorical discourses intertwine is when Palmer speaks of the book in relation to Anne Gilchrist. Touchingly, and perhaps uniquely, he describes the book as hers (*Anne Gilchrist*, pp.143 - 5). But in this possession, there is, as Palmer himself says, a doubleness. The book in the possession of Anne Gilchrist is both dead and alive, inspired and expired. It is a monument to her dead husband which she devoted her life to completing, infusing the book with her own creativity, her own editorial and authoritative power. Rather than the printed page signalling the oblique space of a "tissue of [arbitrary] signs",<sup>377</sup> the publication of the author's work is an act of preservation for the late Romantics and early Victorians.

In Donald Reiman's description of the Golden Age of editing, the editor is co-creator with the dead author, reconstructing works out of the obscurity of manuscript fragments, or as Thomas Carlyle would put it, creating order out of chaos: "[...] where the author's own publications and manuscripts seemed obscured, the editor or publisher often 'clarified'" ("Four Ages of Editing", p.87). Gilchrist's *Life* is a very peculiar example of the power and force of the book in the realm of mourning and memorial. At the same time as the book (*The Life of William Blake*) is described as "an indestructible life", Palmer also describes the *Life* as an "imperishable monument". But the "monument", *The Life of William Blake* (1863), is a double memorial, commemorating both William Blake and Alexander Gilchrist. Anne Gilchrist is not only concerned with the textual editing of Blake's works, but with the creation of a book that will be a memorial to her husband. Donald Reiman chooses well in placing the widow first in the line of possible

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377 Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author" in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p.171.

“mourning” editors (“Four Ages of Editing”, p.86). Anne Gilchrist is a gentle but formidable character, passive and active, persuasive and aggressive:

In regard to the additional chapter, I earnestly thank Mr. Rossetti and yourself. If it ought to be done, assuredly his and yours are the hands to which I would gratefully intrust the task. But I think you will not find it hard to forgive me a little reluctance that *any* living tones should blend with that voice which here speaks for the last time on earth. I will not however, sacrifice the interests of the book to this feeling. Perhaps we are not yet in a position to decide with certainty what is best. When I have incorporated all additional matter contained in the notes, we shall be better able to do so. (*Anne Gilchrist*, p.124)

There is a feeling in much of the correspondence concerning the 1863 edition of the *Life* that the book exists in a strange twilight zone between the living and the dead. In a letter written to a relative in 1863 Anne Gilchrist describes the labour of love that the *Life* became after Alexander Gilchrist’s death: “That beloved task (the Blake) kept my head above water in the deep sea of affliction, and now it is ended I sometimes feel like to sink - to sink, that is, into pining discontent - and a relaxing of the hold upon all high aims. I find it so hard to get on at anything beyond the inevitable daily routine, deprived of that beloved and genial Presence, which so benignantly and tenderly fostered all good, strengthening the hands, cheering the heart, quickening the intellect even” (*Anne Gilchrist*, p.142). There is an uncanny sense in reading this letter that the “beloved and genial Presence” Anne speaks of may be either the ghostly presence of Alexander Gilchrist or the material presence of the book, *The Life of William Blake*, remembered in terms of physical and mental labour and volition. Anne’s words reflect Ruskin’s comments on the book in *Sesame and Lilies*: “But a book is written, not to multiply the

voice merely, not to carry it merely, but to preserve it".<sup>378</sup> The fraying of the dividing line between personal life and literary project seems to surround the *Life*. This is Dante Gabriel Rossetti writing to Anne Gilchrist in 1862, following the death of Elizabeth Siddal: "Whenever it may be necessary to be thinking about the 'Life of Blake,' I hope you will let me know; as my brother is equally anxious with myself, and perhaps at the present moment better able to be of any service in his power. While writing this. I have just read your letter again, and again feel forcibly the bond of misery which exists between us; and the unhappy right we have of saying to each other what we both know to be fruitless".<sup>379</sup> Rossetti's reaching after a particular kind of life - the biographical "life" of Blake, the material "life" of the book - is hedged around by the unspoken remembrance of things past, by the frailty of human wishes, and ultimately by death.

When the creation of a book becomes a poetics of mourning in the post-Romantic age, what is being traversed in an aesthetic realm is the ever-emerging gulf between the secular world and the fast disappearing theological horizon. The book for Anne Gilchrist and Dante Gabriel Rossetti makes the personal poetic. The book is a lynch-pin of shared experience and communal memory. What the Blake enthusiasts hope to regain in their devotion to the "Book" is the human capacity to communicate feelings, thoughts and sense beyond the self. Ironically, the printed text, from its inception in the Middle Ages, through the Gutenberg Bible and the Copernican revolution, has been seen as a "heretical" device, fragmenting the Bible and its world. At the same time, while print fractured one worldview and introduced doubt into the world of Scripture, it opened up hermetic linguistic and textual systems. Print was in this sense the first prophet of the

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<sup>378</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame & Lilies, The Two Paths, & The King of the Golden River* (London: J.M. Dent, 1907), p.8.

<sup>379</sup> 2nd March 1862 ( *Anne Gilchrist*, p.122).

secular tradition.<sup>380</sup> But with the self-determination and self-expression on which print culture thrives, comes alienation from the theological and social certainties that preceded the secular or aesthetic book. Marshall McLuhan extrapolates print as a humanist evolution of the text, in which communal identity with the sacred is dissolved: "Print is the extreme phase of alphabet culture that detribalizes or decollectivizes man in the first instance. [...]. Print is the technology of individualism".<sup>381</sup> For McLuhan print culture places human subjectivity at the centre of the universe, while at the same time plunging that subjectivity into existentialist angst: "But the paradox of the passion for certitude in print culture is that it must proceed by the method of doubt. We shall find abundance of such paradoxes in the new technology that made each book reader the centre of the universe and also enabled Copernicus to toss man to the periphery of the heavens, dislodging him from the centre of the physical world" (*Gutenberg Galaxy*, p.156). In an age of scientific positivism, of evolutionary theory, of expanding print technology, prototype cultural theorists such as Thomas Carlyle seek to make the book a cultural symbol, a secular artefact that retains the mystical, indefinable part of human life and community. Ruskin's ideal book is human and communicable to the last degree: "The author has something to say which he perceives to be true and useful or helpfully beautiful. So far as he knows, no one else has yet said it; so far as he knows, no one else can say it. He is bound to say it, clearly and melodiously if he may; clearly, at all events. [...]. That is his 'writing;' it is, in his small human way, and with whatever degree of true inspiration is in him, his inscription, or scripture. That is a 'Book'" (*Sesame and Lilies*, p.8).

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380 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: communications and transformations in early-modern Europe* 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), I, p.311.

381 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p.158.

For those involved in the reproduction and publication of Blake - both the artisan labourer and the Pre-Raphaelite critic - there is a conflict between the human capacity of the book to "touch" the reader and the mechanical alienation of intellectual and physical labour within print culture. William Muir's facsimiles turn this conflict in on itself, turning back to Blake's original moment of execution: "If your Highness thinks this somewhat meager and indefinite I can only plead with Mr Gilchrist, the difficulty of giving shape to that which hath none. The fact is that this Book and others like it are merely reveries, fancies noted down as they presented themselves to Blake's consciousness, and born not on attention acting intelligently on a definite subject and with a definite purpose, but of mere unconscious cerebration".<sup>382</sup>

The "mere unconscious cerebration" is an important factor in Muir's "humanising" of the book and the process of book production. Muir takes Blake's work back to the realm of mystical correspondence, recalling the "automatic" writing of Garth Wilkinson in *Improvisations of the Spirit*: "The automatic way in which they presented themselves to Blake seems to have suggested to him that they might be projections from some other sphere of being. Apart from their origin [*sic*] they are all most suggestive reveries. Their dim dealings with human passions and struggle stimulate the fancy of both poet and painter in much the same way as the sounds and sights of nature do" ("Preface", *VDA*). The unconscious, sensuous communion of human imagination would seem to be at odds with the consciously formed simulacra that the facsimile edition entails. This is where Muir's prefaces come into their own, preserving both the immediacy of the text and the humanity of the book.

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<sup>382</sup> William Muir, "Preface" to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (London: Edmonton Press, 1885). (No page numbers).



William Muir's prefaces are material events in themselves. He produced several prefaces using the production technique he describes in the programme. The preface looks like the text from one of William Blake's illuminated works. Muir literally manifests McGann's theorem concerning the encoding of texts as both material and linguistic systems of signification. The human hand upon the copperplate is entwined with the technology of the text. Muir himself cites the technology that was oppressing the craft production that had made Blake's works unique in the first place. The art of the engraver that had, to paraphrase Paul Mann, created the aura surrounding the material presence of Blake's works was being eroded by the developing technologies of reproduction, such as photography or chrome-lithography. Muir's preface places the work within a specific material history. For example, in the preface to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Muir places the illuminated book in a far more direct and rigorous socio-historical context than either Gilchrist or Swinburne (Swinburne alludes to the French Revolution (AS, p.223), but does not directly name it in relation to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Rousseau issued his tract on the 'Social Contract' in 1762. It was the first articulate utterance of that mode of thought which is now called Radicalism. It came and went like a gleam of lightning. The thunder followed in 1789, and continued for thirty years. Blake published this book before the hopes that were roused by the French Revolution had been disappointed by its excesses. This must in fairness be remembered when the book is read".<sup>383</sup> As Muir describes the literary, theoretical and social discourses of Blake's world, he brings the text to life with graphic minutiae stolen from Blake's illuminated works (figure 16). The immediate political reality of radicalism in 1789 is re-enacted using the radical artisan technique of 1789. What Muir achieves in his reproduction is beyond mere copy. It is the preservation of human hand and human history within the culture of print technology.

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383 William Muir, "Preface" to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (London: Edmonton Press, 1885). No page numbers.

What Muir does in the prefaces for his facsimile reproductions is to posit *difference* in the material production of the text. In doing so, he pinpoints a hermeneutic rupture point in the chain of literary production that runs from original work to production to interpretation. The production of the work is an act of interpretation. Muir's direct appropriation of the means of original textual production to make this point places his small run of fifty facsimile copies at the centre of the Blake revival rather than at the margins. Muir's facsimiles are index points in the changing technology of the text. Blake's illuminated work, *The Book of Thel*, is not simply reproduced as a simulacra of originality. In Muir's reproduction, the book becomes an index of historical change. The importance of Muir's prefaces for nineteenth-century reproduction of Blake is the conjunction they mark between the artisan tradition and the developing history of literary production. Muir managed to retain a distinct artisan accent within the print culture of the 1880s, while at the same time ensuring commercial success: "Blake's comparatively slight success as a sales-man of his works arose in part, of course, because he had to create virtually unaided a market for his strange (i.e., unfamiliar) works. Muir had greater success in selling somewhat approximate facsimiles of the same works because, by 1884 when he issued his first proposals, Blake's reputation had been firmly established in the biographies of J.T. Smith (1828), Allan Cunningham (1830), and especially Alexander Gilchrist (1863, 1880), in the critical eulogies of Swinburne (1868), and others, and in editions such as those by Shepherd (1874), and Rossetti (1874 et seq)" (Bentley, "Blake ... Had No Quaritch", p.12). As Keri Davies confirms, Muir was producing Blake's works within a very definite social and aesthetic dynamic: "It was into this milieu with its passionate interest in the art of Blake that Muir introduced the facsimiles of the Blake Press" (Davies, "William Muir", p.18). Muir is clearly part of the Blake industry that preceded the academic reception of Blake in the

twentieth century. But he manages to keep at bay the “maw of commerce”, while at the same time distinguishing his methods of book production from the conventions of print technology and literary institutions. William Muir’s success in creating such unique reproductions of Blake’s works comes in part from his unique relationship with Quaritch who, acting as agent and distributor, provided Muir’s point of connection with the literary market place. At the same time, Quaritch, as frontman, allowed Muir independence from an institutionalised literary establishment of editors, reviewers and publishers.

William Muir brought William Blake into direct contact with the immediate moment of cultural reproduction. This moment is besieged on all sides by other discourses, ranging from technological progress through sacred nostalgia to the secular audience. Although artisan craft stands alone in its labour, it cannot extricate itself from the nineteenth century process of aesthetic production in which these discourses are tied up.

# AESTHETIC PRODUCTIONS

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *Aesthetic Productions: Facsimiles, Forgeries and Fakes*

#### *1. Sacred Auras and Secular Audiences*

Walter Benjamin sees this immediacy of graphic reproduction as delivering the sanctity of art into the secular bustle of everyday life.<sup>384</sup>

With lithography the technique of reproduction reached an essentially new stage. This much more direct process was distinguished by the tracing of the design on a stone rather than its incision on a block of wood or its etching on a copperplate and permitted graphic art for the first time to put its products on the market, not only in large numbers as hitherto, but also in daily changing forms. Lithography enabled graphic art to illustrate everyday life, and it began to keep pace with printing. But only a few decades after its invention, lithography was surpassed by photography. For the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens". Since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech (*Work of Art*, p.213).

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384 Although the full conjunction of picture and voice in film is still a long way off in the 1860s, the ability to reproduce original art effectively had implications for the socio-political context in which Blake's works were reproduced, particularly in pamphlets and periodicals. See John Hartan, *The History of the Illustrated Book: the Western tradition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p.201: "Interest in the anecdote, the moment of time caught by the artist, the incident of ordinary life recorded in its comic, nostalgic, edifying or admonitory aspect, was strong in the nineteenth century. Novelists at this time often had a strong visual sense (one has but to think of the detailed descriptions of rooms and street scenes assembled by Dickens and Balzac), and illustrators were correspondingly literal in their approach".

Art is art because it is buried in the ritual of culture, and is itself produced by ritual. Break that ritual and the first splinter appears in the sanctity of the work, allowing in political iconoclasm for the masses and the banality of technically amassed images:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history it has experienced. [...] One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. [...] The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. [...] In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty. [...] With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis which had become evident a century later. (*Work of Art*, pp.215 – 18)

The work of art, the building block of Benjamin's essay, is an aesthetic analogue, a mirror of its own production. Mechanised methods of reproduction depreciate art, diminishing authenticity and placing art into the realm of profanity. Morris Eaves's assessment of Blake and technological reproducibility is indebted to the diminished aura of Benjamin's "work of art", citing the "[...]necessary condition of the counter arts" as "imitation", and "the sufficient condition" as "replacement of the original by the

imitation”.<sup>385</sup> However, in the movement from original to imitation to dissimulation, Eaves’s concerns begin to diverge from Benjamin’s. Benjamin focuses on the product as analogue, and on the aesthetics of production, whereas Eaves concentrates on the technology of aesthetics, on the digitalisation of the reproduction process, which Blake “[...] castigated as ‘division’” (*Counter-Arts*, p.186). Holding in balance both Benjamin’s nostalgia for the sacred aura of the work and Eaves’s technological narrative of engraving, the product and process of Blake’s works in the nineteenth century fall into a cultural pattern: original, imitation and dissimulation become facsimile, forgery, and as I shall argue, fake. But rather than ask these questions - facsimile? forgery? fake? (questions which it is agreed must be asked), the question which a secular devotee of aesthetics and technology should ask is “Is it a failure”? In a secular age - in an “access all areas” culture, including areas of theological doubt and technological advancement, of freethinking and free-marketeering, in which “[t]he public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one” (*Work of Art*, p.234), in which the way to return to the authentic ritual of production is to ritually withdraw from the public market-place (*Counter-Arts*, p.237) – failure becomes an aesthetic question laden with socio-political responsibility.

Did the nineteenth century fail Blake aesthetically? The Victorians certainly copied him and forged him and faked him. Blake may have been flattered by the contemporary facsimiles of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* executed probably in 1805 and 1821, and described by Bentley “[...]as an act of love”.<sup>386</sup> Blake probably would have been flattered if these facsimiles were made with the same sensitivity, the same

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385 Morris Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: art and industry in the age of Blake* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.161. Hereafter this text will be referred to as *Counter-Arts*, followed by page number(s).

386 G.E. Bentley, “Two Contemporary Facsimiles of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*” in *Bibliographical Society of America* 54 (1970), pp.450 – 63 (p.459).

individual feeling that Tulk employed in his little copy, or Muir worked so hard to recreate in his facsimiles. It is not simply the fact of being repeated that Blake despaired of in the *Public Address*, when seething with ire he declared “To Imitate I abhor” (*PA*, p.20, E580). Disregard for original conception - an originality that may or may not be coupled to revolutionary vision and/or political dissent - is what Blake foresaw and feared in the homogenised art of the free-market. In Eaves’s theory, Blake’s trepidation concerning imitation revolves around the “artistic machine”. For Blake, the artistic machine is a technological Brobdingnagian.<sup>387</sup> The artistic machine is a mechanical giant, towering over and devouring weaker technology, which may be finer, more delicate technology, but technology not able to withstand the demands of extension in the marketplace, exemplified in the “[...] technological fragility of engraving” (*Counter-Arts*, p.187). Blake does not despise the reproduced work, but detests the work that does not say, or does not know to say, what it is: “The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling” (*PA*, p.63 –4, E550).

If we can imagine Blake’s indulgence towards facsimiles created by loving hands in loving tribute to him, facsimiles that do not pretend to be other than they are (you could not really mistake a Muir facsimile for an original unless you had a very peculiar notion of Blake’s originality), we can make a guess at his disgust with facsimiles that have tripped over into the realm of forgery. In the last twenty years, nineteenth-century

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387 Morris Eaves, “Blake and the Artistic Machine: an essay in decorum and technology” in *PMLA* 92 (1977), pp.903 – 27 (p.907): “To put the matter simply, Blake wanted to live in a society based on artistic principles, and he found himself living in one based on technological principles. The result was the intrusion of commercial technology into art in the form of ‘artistic machines.’ The intrusion takes the following form. The system of reproduction is fixed and cannot change. The artist can change his original to accommodate it – match it – to the system, and the *system* thus becomes the *style* of the artist who is willing to become what the machine can behold. This is what Blake called the Limits of Opacity and Contraction, man becoming the machine he creates in order to get mechanical advantage, which is usually a commercial advantage, certainly not often an artistic one”.



forgeries/facsimiles of two of Blake's works have come to light, both of these discoveries resulting from the scholarship of Joseph Viscomi. Firstly, there is the 1983 discovery, made in conjunction with Thomas V. Lange, of two forged plates in the otherwise authentic *America* copy B, created to make up an incomplete copy.<sup>388</sup> Viscomi gives the likely date of execution for the facsimile as 1874, the place as London, the method as photolithography, the model as copy F and the reason as the surreptitious completion of the incomplete (Viscomi, *Facsimile or Forgery?*, p.222). Viscomi then comments concerning the long time acceptance of these forged plates as original: "To their credit, plates 4 and 9 are not only extremely good forgeries, but, and I think this is equally important, as pages in a bound volume, they appear innocent by association. Had plates 4 and 9 been separate prints, it is more likely they would have been detected long ago. As it is, no other illuminated book, bound or loose, is known to contain a facsimile. Do we need to look harder?" (Viscomi, *Facsimile or Forgery?*, p.222). Viscomi makes testament here to the book's power to credit what is not. This dictum holds true for Viscomi's later disclosure that half of the extant copies of *There Is No Natural Religion* consist either wholly of facsimiles or contain a substantial number of facsimile plates.<sup>389</sup> The back-stepping genealogy deployed to trace these "bogus" plates is complex, but reveals their dependency on book forms for sustainability.

In order to date the forgeries, and, ultimately, attempt to discover the identity of the forger/facsimilist, Viscomi looks at all reproductions of *There Is No Natural Religion* in the nineteenth century. Muir's 1886 facsimile is discounted, on account of the paper

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388 Thomas V. Lange, "Two Forged Plates in *America* Copy B" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 16:4 (1981), pp.212 – 218 and Joseph Viscomi, "Facsimile or Forgery? an examination of *America*, Plates 4 and 9, Copy B" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 16:4 (1981), pp.2189– 223.

389 "When enlarged and compared to authentic impressions, here represented by those in copy C, all set II impressions clearly reveal different letter shapes, fake color printing, and washes in imitation of copy C's impressions. The copies formed from set II impressions are copies E, F, H, I, J, and K, though copies F, H, and I have five authentic impressions that were added after their initial collation. The copies formed from set I impressions are copies A, B, C, D, G, and M. All impressions in these copies are authentic" (*IB*, pp.201 – 203).

used (despite the 1886 facsimile having an 1811 watermark as do the bogus plates, the paper is of different quality and different stock) and the sheer unconvincing nature of Muir's work (*IB*, pp.203 – 204). Viscomi then considers Pickering & Co.'s facsimile, also of 1886, and comes to a startling conclusion: the Pickering & Co. facsimile and facsimilist are not implicated in the bogus plates, but used one of them as a believed genuine model, which was itself modelled on the genuine copy C (*IB*, p.205). Books are already folding in on themselves, disrupting the "[...] flow across the cultural space that Blake identified as the space of imitation or reproduction, which is, however, a very well-established institutional frontier in the arts and economics" (*Counter-Arts*, p.191). Moving back through time, trying to fix the date of execution, Viscomi arrives at 1870 and the "curious fact" (*IB*, p.207), that two sets of the bogus copies are bound into extra-illustrated copies of Gilchrist's *Life*. Again, the book folds around itself, gathering disparate production into an analogous whole. Viscomi initially makes a sideways move to the publisher of Swinburne's *William Blake*, John Camden Hotten. Notoriously, and mistakenly, Hotten is associated with Blake's name, not as the publisher of Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay* or with the facsimile of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* produced by Hotten in 1868, but as a potential forger of Blake's works. As Morton D. Paley shows, the "forged" drawings were produced for Hotten by a talented draughtsman in his employ, Henry James Bellars,<sup>390</sup> who had produced facsimile work for *William Blake: a critical essay* (figure 17), and who was working on a projected complete facsimile collection of Blake's works. These drawings were found in a drawer in a cellar after Hotten's death, and subsequently "[...]were acquired by J.W. Bouton along with a considerable number of Hotten's books". Bouton then "[...]offered the drawings for sale in New York ca 1875, perhaps believing they were genuine Blakes"

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390 Morton Paley, "John Camden Hotten, A.C., Swinburne and the Blake Facsimiles of 1868) in *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 7 (1976) pp.259 – 296 (pp.274 – 280).

(Paley, "John Camden Hotten", p.287) Hence the myth of the "John Camden Hotten forgeries" was born.

Viscomi exonerates both Hotten and Bellars from involvement with the *There is No Natural Religion* facsimiles/forgeries,<sup>391</sup> before casting his eye on W.J. Linton and the possible link between the facsimilist of Gilchrist's *Life* and the bogus copies. Describing the production process that can be reconstructed from Linton's preliminary studies, entitled *Blake: Proofs, Photos, Tracings*, as exemplary, Viscomi makes the case that Linton certainly had the skill and expertise to execute the facsimile plates. Viscomi suggests "[...] that Linton – or at least Linton's kerographic technique, which required tracings of originals (or of photographs) and produced relief plates extremely close to but not exactly like the originals – was responsible for the facsimiles" (*IB*, p.211). The concluding supposition is that the likeliest candidate for the "mysterious facsimilist" is "[...]W.J. Linton, perhaps in the employ of B.M. Pickering" (*IB*, p.216), Pickering suggested because he was in possession of copy C at the correct time. This is plausible enough, but Linton's possible involvement in another reproduction, not a facsimile, not a forgery, but a cunning dissemblance, brings his name into conjunction with one of the discounted "usual suspects" of Viscomi's assessment: Buxton Forman.

The pamphlet of the *Address on the Opening of the New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society* is an aesthetic phenomenon. From a cultural perspective, it exhibits the flexibility and inclusiveness of the humanist movement in writing its own history. From

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391 "There are, however, two good reasons to exonerate Hotten and Bellars. First Bellars was a professional lithographer, and, unlike the bogus facsimilist, he used lithography for his Blake facsimiles instead of relief plates (or line blocks). Second, if Hotten had known of *No Natural Religion*, then he most likely discovered it through Milnes (Lord Houghton). Hotten had used Milnes's copy of *Marriage* for his facsimile, and Milnes, who had the most extensive Blake collection of the time, also owned the fifty impressions of *No Natural Religion* that were to form the bogus copies A, B, C, and G, whereas the model for the bogus copies was copy C. Furthermore, the model appears to have been owned at this time by B.M. Pickering. It is very unlikely that one publisher would have lent his private copy to another

a production perspective, it is a wonderful “sham”, an exact copy but not a facsimile, not entirely truthful as to its origins but not a forgery, back-flipping between mirrors of production and reproduction.

*2: The Fake: the pamphlet of the Address on the Opening of the New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society*

The New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society was opened on Sunday, March 6th, 1881. A strange communion of saints, sinners and scholars were chosen to represent the intellectual tenets of Secularism.<sup>392</sup> The illustrious company of poets and philosophers built into the pillars of the Secular Hall were joined on March 6th, 1881 by Annie Besant and James Thomson. For the occasion Thomson had written an “address on the opening of the New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society” to be delivered by Mrs Theodore Wright. The pamphlet which was produced to transmit this oral event acknowledges Thomson’s status as the “poet of pessimism”, the illuminated title page describing him as the author of *The City of Dreadful Night* and *Vane’s Story*. But the poetic address is not apocalyptic but prophetic, creating a new ideology based on a radical humanist inversion of the creator:

To build our Temples on another plan,  
Devoting them to god’s Creator, Man;  
Not to Man’s creature, god. And thus, indeed  
All Men and Women of whatever creed  
We welcome gladly if they love their kind;

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publisher to produce what he also was capable of producing --unless the facsimile was to be a joint venture”(IB, p.207).

392 A.L. Vago”, F.J. Gould, *The History of the Leicester Secular Society* (published by the society, 1900), p.20: “In the carved capitals of the five stone pillars which carry the front on the ground storey are to be read the names of Socrates, Jesus, Voltaire, Thomas Paine and Robert Owen: and in corresponding niches above are placed terra-cotta busts of these personages”.

No other valid test of worth we find.

The syntactical chiasma - “To build our Temples on another plan. / Devoting them to god’s Creator, Man;/ Not to Man’s creature, god” - compresses the secular and mystical universe into three poetic lines. In those three lines there is a transfixing admixture. The secular and the divine are lyrically wrapped around each other, while at the same time the crucial difference between them is sharply carved out. A new spin is put on ontological discourse, displacing the metaphysical horizon of the eschatological with the human relations of the sociological. Yet, the displacement of divine horizons does not absolutely deconstruct human aspirations to know what is beyond that horizon. What is deconstructed, in the address, is the metaphysical aspirations of scientific reason:

We gaze into the Living World and mark  
Infinite Mysteries for ever dark:  
And if there is a God beyond our thought  
(How could He be within its compass brought?)  
[...]  
He cannot love the blasphemous pretence  
Of puny manikins with purblind sense  
To see Him thoroughly, to know Him well,  
His secret purposes, His Heaven and Hell,  
His inmost nature - formulating this  
With calmest chemical analysis  
Or vivisectioning it, as if it were

*Some compound gas, or dog with brain laid bare.*<sup>393</sup>

This is an extraordinary conundrum to drop into the middle of a work celebrating the rationalism of secularism and the self-determination of humanism. If a secularist can not trust scientific empiricism to decode humanity's place in the universe, what discourse is left to explain a humanist ontology? The answer is not provided as a neat truism, but is there in the address, in Thomson's twisting metaphysics. Humanity has the ability to create its own ontological blueprint from its own inherent creativity, and does not necessarily have to conform to a design dictated by the deistic tendency of rationalistic science. In Walter Benjamin's reading, the nineteenth century grafted technology onto theology, and aesthetic production became the ritual creation of a profane world. The only problem for the radical inclinations of the freethinkers with *l'art pour art* reproducibility is the denial of social function.<sup>394</sup> As we have seen, Swinburne's articulation of Art for Art's sake puts Aestheticism in a far more volatile place than the socio-political neutrality of pure beauty. The Secular Hall pamphlet, however, makes a virtue of technical reproducibility, proving Benjamin wrong in his assessment of the withdrawal of art from technology, and the consequent inability of art or technology to differentiate and comment upon socio-political content.

The pamphlet, ostensibly published to celebrate the opening of the Leicester Secular Hall is a stunning example of the social integration of aesthetic technology within a communal text. The illustrations for the pamphlet can all be broken into semiotic units that are taken directly from the designs of William Blake. It is not true to say that these

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393 James Thomson, *An Address on the Opening of the Leicester Secular Society, Sunday, March 6th 1881* (no publication details, no page numbers).

394 "At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of 'pure' art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing of subject matter" (*Work of Art*, p.218).

are facsimile reproductions as they are a synthesis of fragments assimilated and re-inscribed in the pamphlet. The sequence of fragments in relation to the William Blake's works is as follows:

**SECULAR HALL PAMPHLET**

**BLAKE'S WORK**

Title – last “s” of address (*figure 18*)

*Songs of Experience*, title, last “s” of *Songs* (*figure 19*)

Title-page border (*figure 18*)

*Job*, plate 20, border (*figure 20*)

Tailpiece (*figure 21*)

*Job*, plate 12, detail from border (*figure 22*)

Border of text (*figure 23*)

*Job*, plate 8, border (*figure 24*)

Final tailpiece (*figure 25*)

*Jerusalem*, plate 9, detail from border (*figure 26, 27*)

The marginal illustrations are exact replicas of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, and a fragment taken from *Jerusalem*. There is hermeneutic appropriateness in Blake's *Job* appearing in a pamphlet celebrating Secularism. As Andrew Soloman tells us:

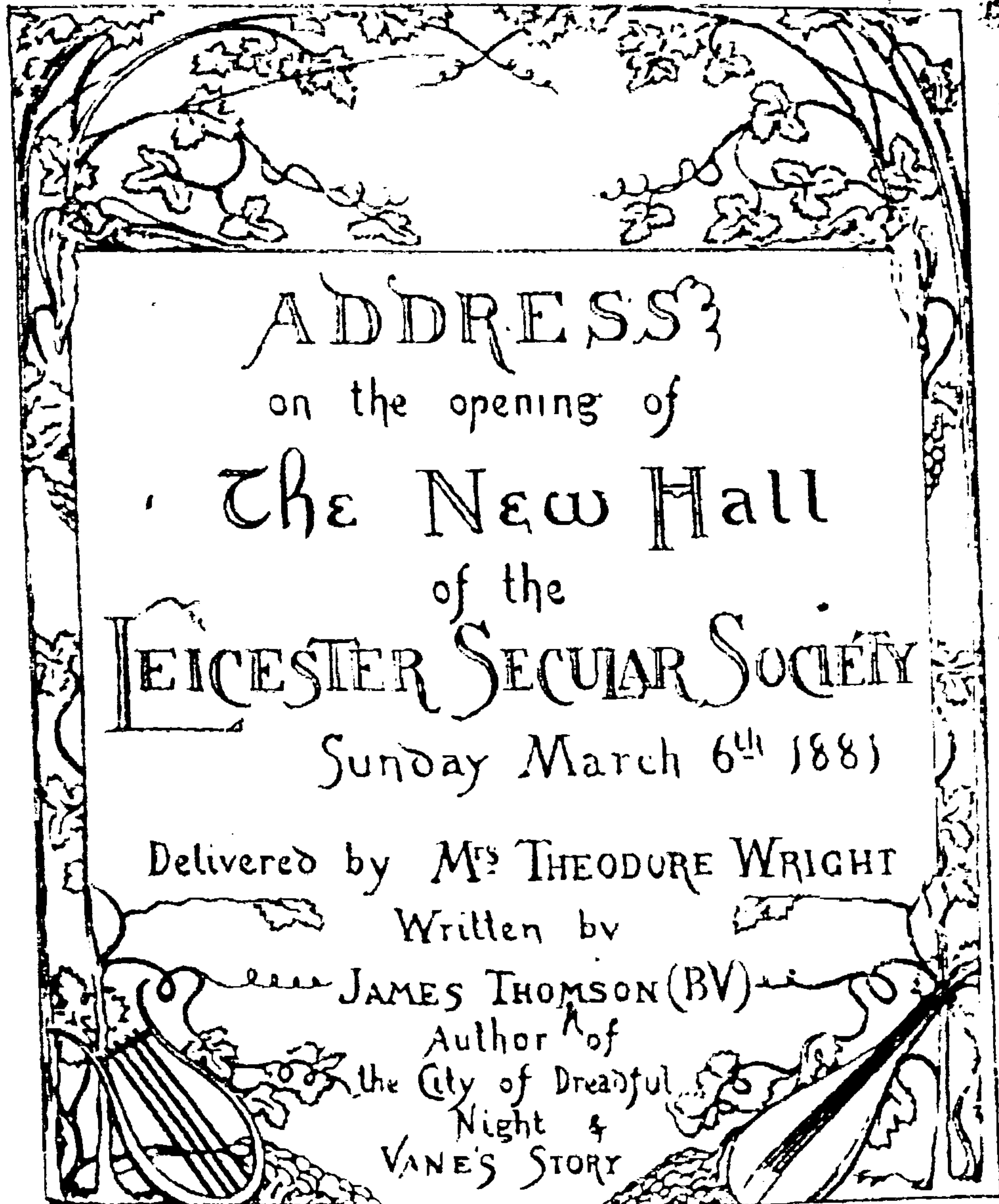
“Blake's image of God is in the exact likeness of Job himself [...]. To him there was no other God than the Human Imagination, the Divine Humanity, the creative power in man”.<sup>395</sup> In fact the plates used have a carefully constructed significance to “god's Creator, Man”. For example, Kathleen Raine tells us that the vine in the margin of plate 20 is one of Blake's symbols for “the Divine Body of Jesus the Imagination” and quotes *A Vision of the Last Judgement* in this context: “All things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination”.<sup>396</sup> As to the form of the illustrations, the pamphlet is reproducing a design that was already ready considered dated in its original form: “By continuing this practice [of border design] Blake brought to the *Job* illustrations what must have

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395 Andrew Soloman, *Blake's Job: a message for our time* (London: Palambron Press, 1993), p.2.

396 Kathleen Raine, *The Human Face of God: William Blake and the Book of Job* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p.257.

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ADDRESS  
on the opening of  
The New Hall  
of the  
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY  
Sunday March 6<sup>th</sup> 1881  
Delivered by M<sup>rs</sup> THEODORE WRIGHT  
Written by  
JAMES THOMSON (BV)  
Author of  
the City of Dreadful  
Night &  
VANE'S STORY

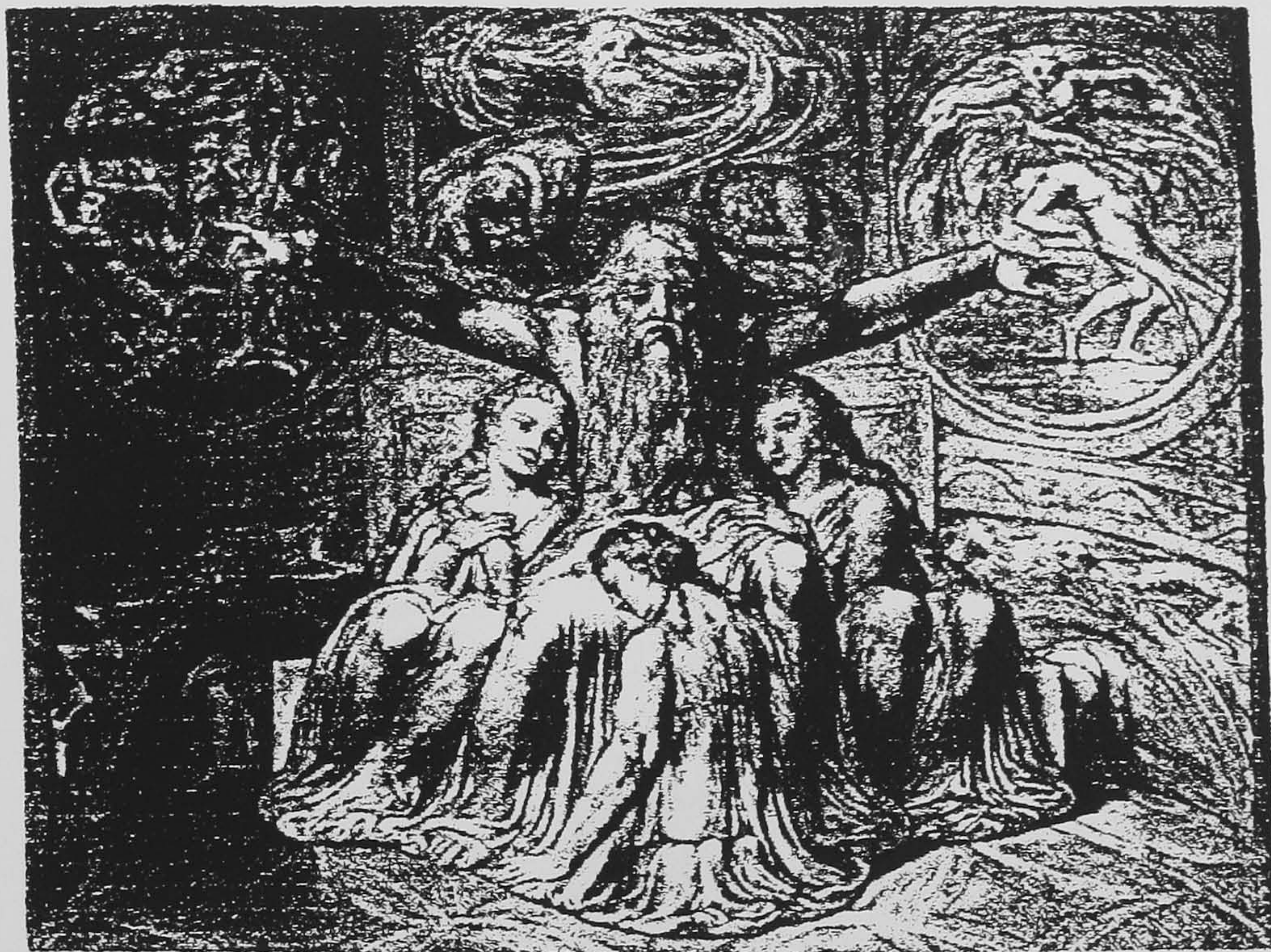
figure 18





figure 19

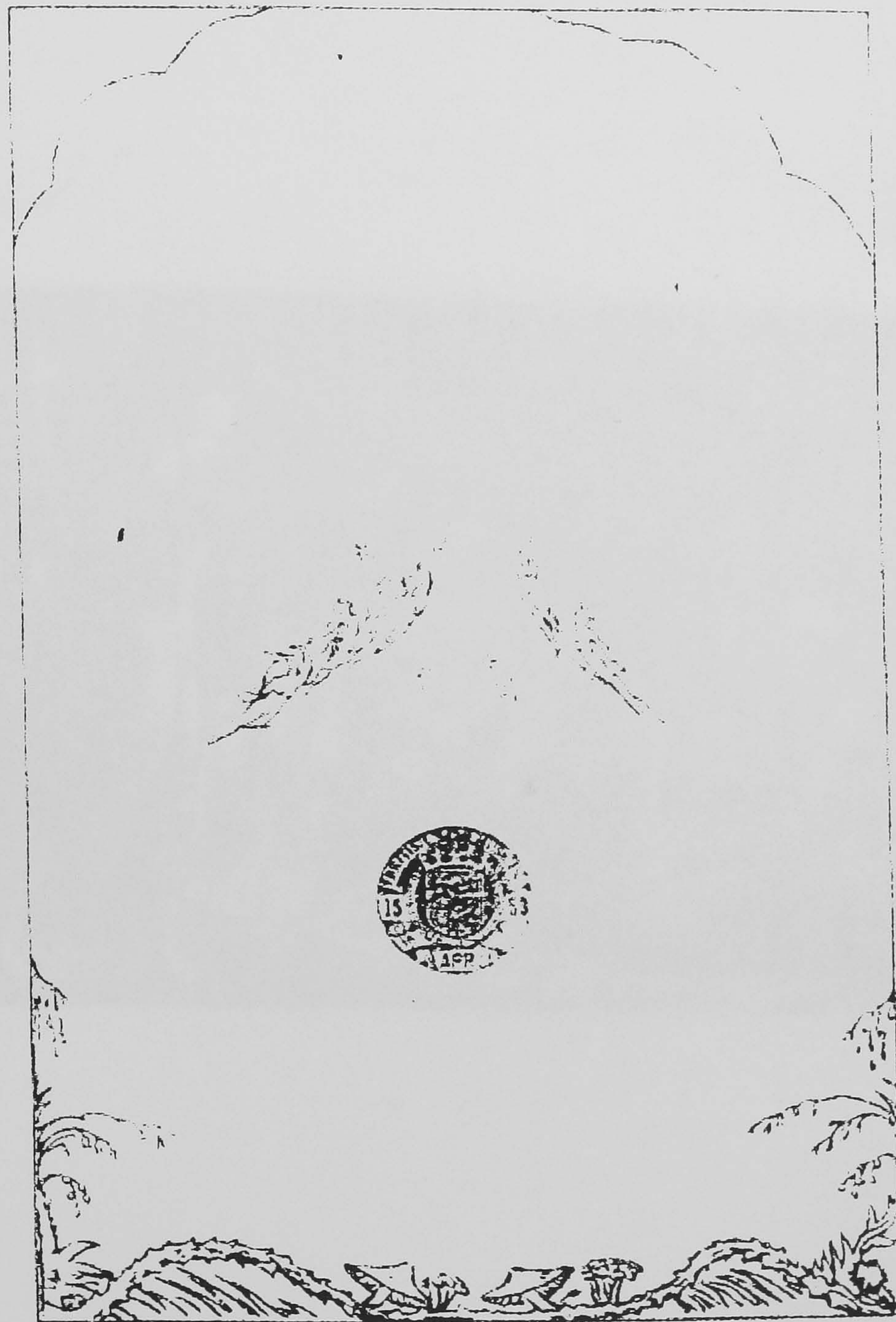
How precious are thy thoughts  
unto me O God  
How great is the sum of them



These were not found Women fair as the Daughters of Job  
in all the Land & their Father gave them Inheritance  
among the Brethren

It is not in the Heart of man that the Righteous  
is made straight: neither is it in the  
understanding of man that he shall  
be able to understand the counsel of the Lord

figure 20



*figure 21*

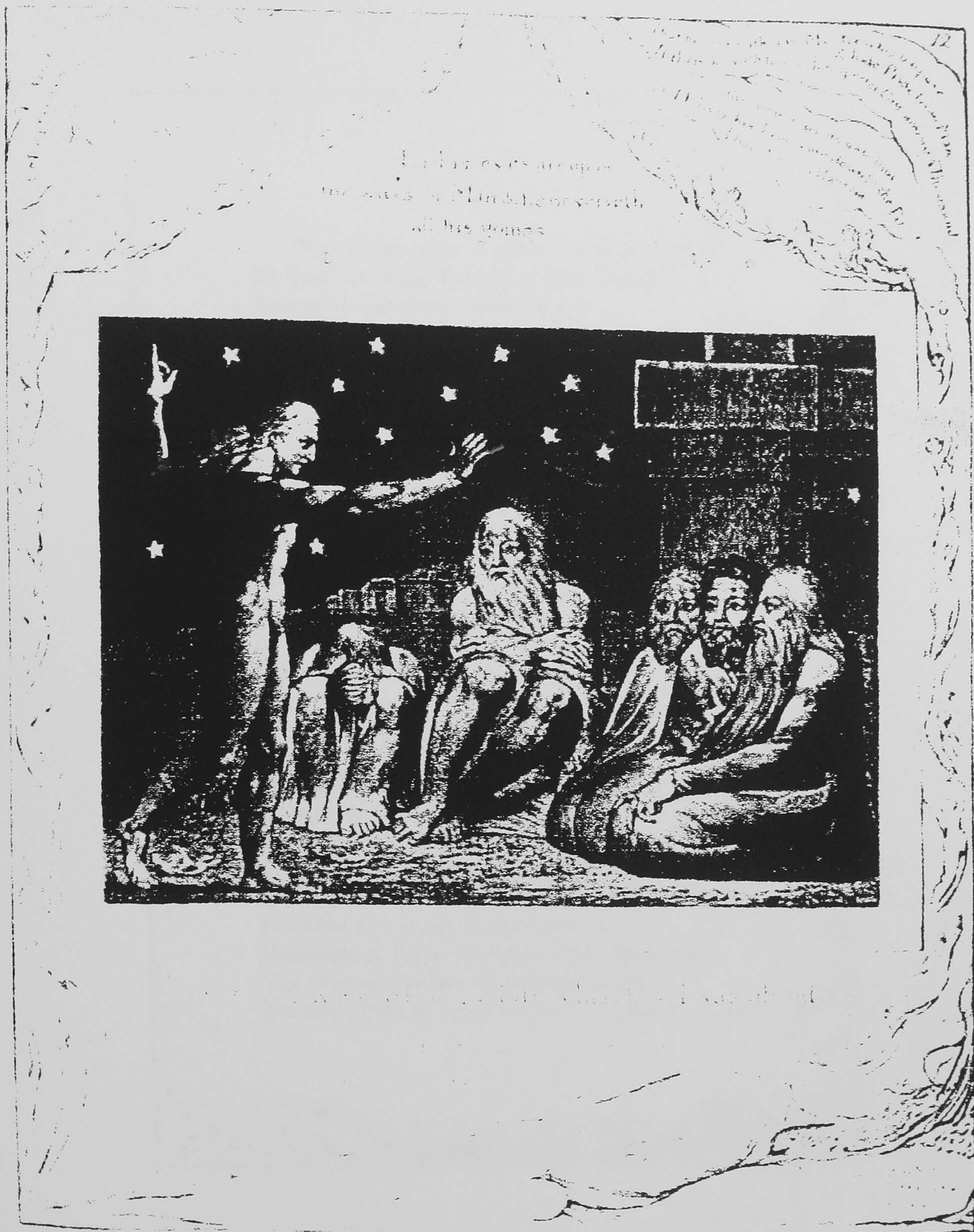
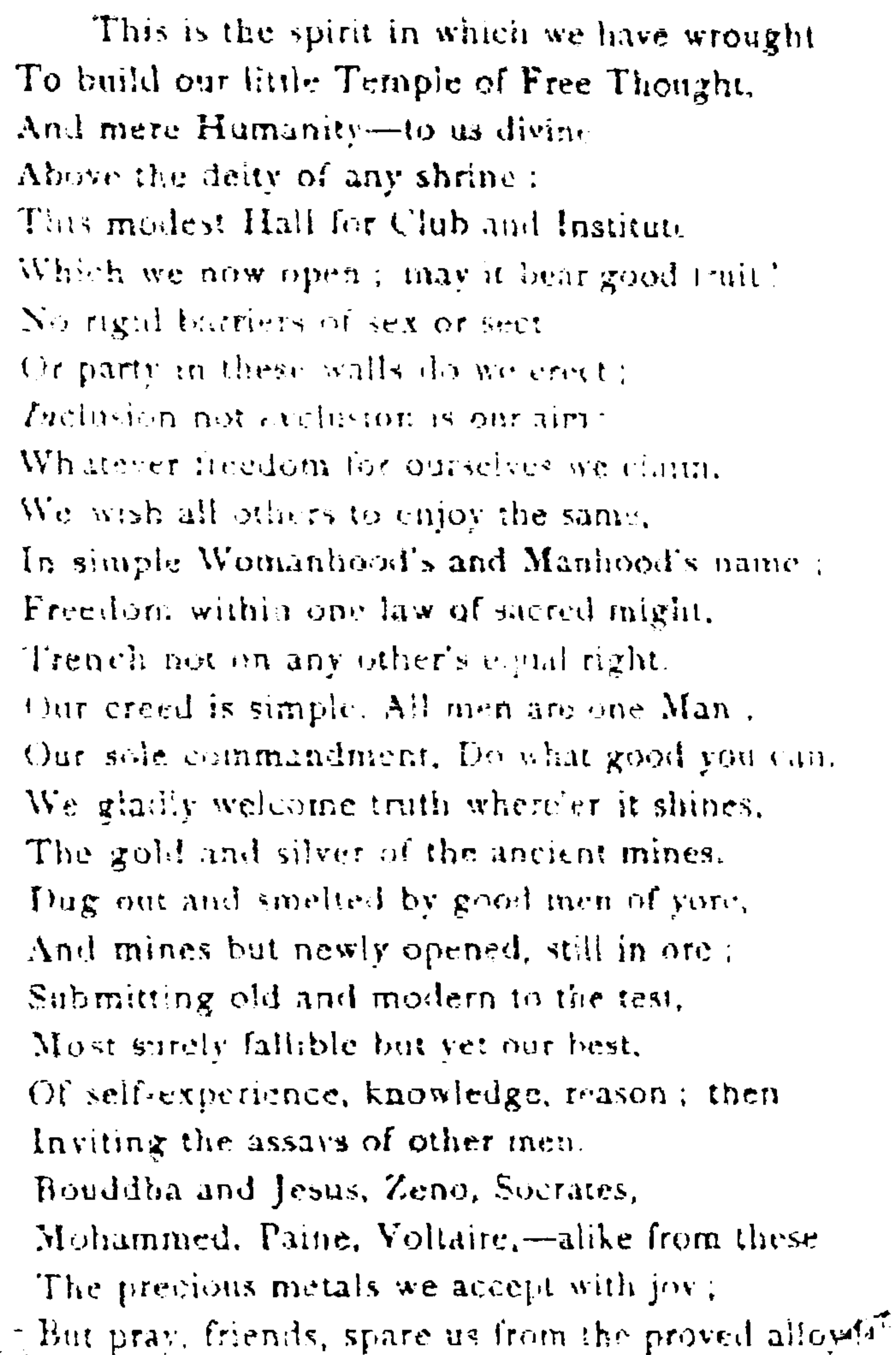


figure 22



This is the spirit in which we have wrought  
To build our little Temple of Free Thought,  
And mere Humanity—to us divine  
Above the deity of any shrine ;  
This modest Hall for Club and Institute,  
Which we now open ; may it bear good fruit !  
No rigid barriers of sex or sect  
Or party in these walls do we erect ;  
Inclusion not exclusion is our aim ;  
Whatever freedom for ourselves we claim,  
We wish all others to enjoy the same,  
In simple Womanhood's and Manhood's name ;  
Freedom within one law of sacred might,  
Trench not on any other's equal right.  
Our creed is simple. All men are one Man .  
Our sole commandment, Do what good you can.  
We gladly welcome truth wherever it shines,  
The gold and silver of the ancient mines,  
Dug out and smelted by good men of yore,  
And mines but newly opened, still in ore ;  
Submitting old and modern to the test,  
Most surely fallible but yet our best,  
Of self-experience, knowledge, reason ; then  
Inviting the assays of other men,  
Bouddha and Jesus, Zeno, Socrates,  
Mohammed, Paine, Voltaire,—alike from these  
The precious metals we accept with joy ;  
But pray, friends, spare us from the proved alloy !

*figure 23*

Lo let that night be solitary  
& let no joyful voice come therein



Let the Day perish wherein I was Born

And they sat down with him upon the ground seven days & seven  
nights & none spake a word unto him for they saw that his grief  
was very great

figure 24



*figure 25*





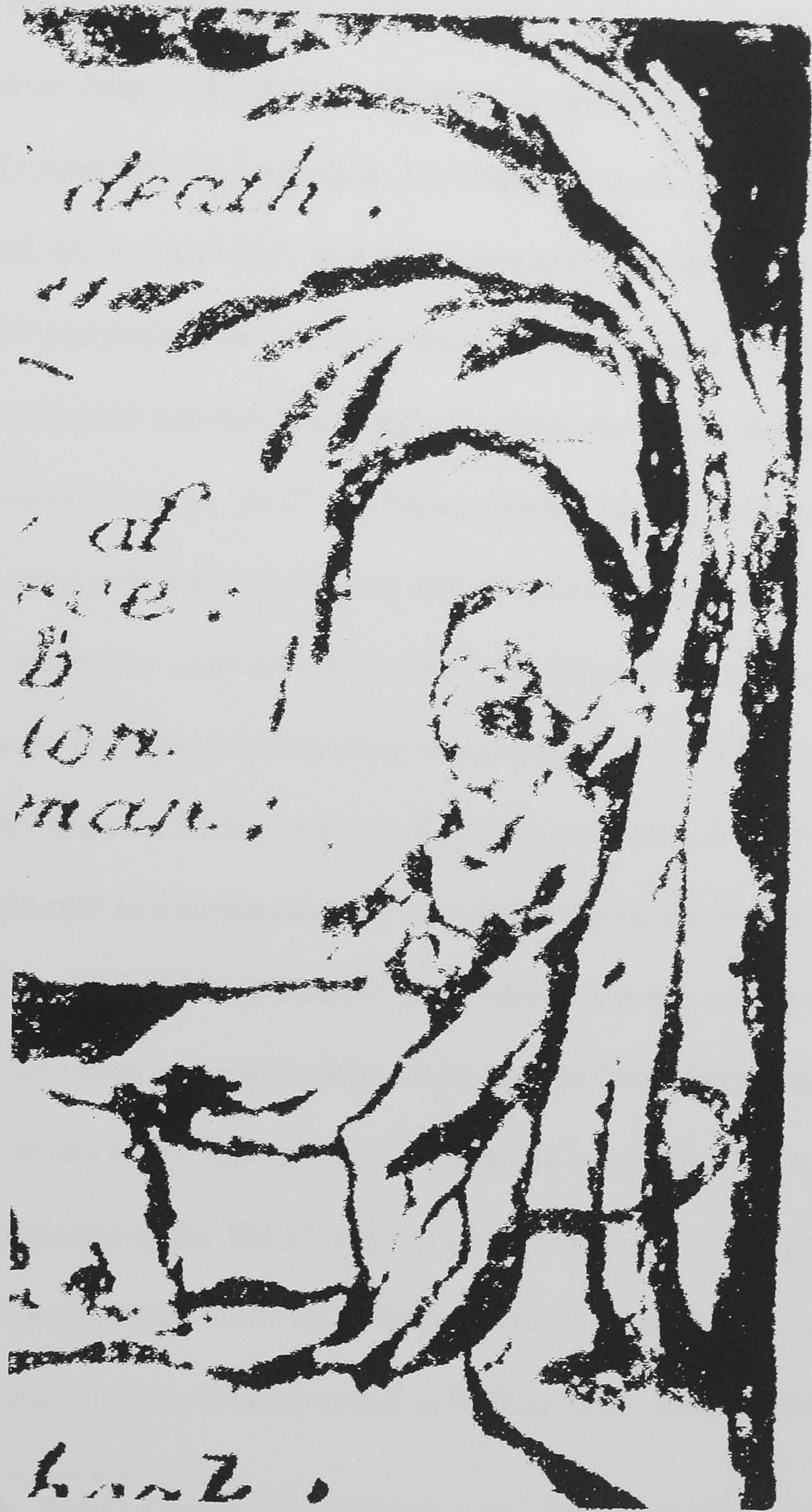


figure 27

seemed an old-fashioned practice in an era when an increasing number of book illustrations were printed without borders or even framing lines”.<sup>397</sup>

However, the strange silence of the marginalia reflects the crack in the mirror of nineteenth-century Blake reproduction. Nowhere on the detailed and precise title page is Blake (or the facsimilist) acknowledged. The illustrations are silent to their own significance and, at the same time, brimming over with unspoken meaning. What the producers of the text have done is to make the material presence of the text evoke the unconscious continuum between Blake and Thomson, mysticism and secularism, aestheticism and materialism. An “open secret society” has been constructed, whereby seemingly opaque symbolism has distinct and transparent meaning if only you know what you are looking for, and can sense a universal correspondence. As previously mentioned, James Thomson, writing under the pseudonym of “B.V.”, wrote in 1866 (the same year as his essay on Blake), a series of articles on “open secret societies”. He defines them initially as a communion of thought and spirit manifest throughout the ages in cultural symbols.<sup>398</sup> Significantly, Thomson lists poets and mystics among those that enjoy this unconscious membership. The poem for Thomson is a symbol illuminated by mystical correspondence.<sup>399</sup> As Blake’s composite art creates a textual play, so the marginalia of the 1881 pamphlet recalls the mystical imagination at work beneath the rational surface of the text. However, the “eternal Return” of the mystical imagination is only manifested in material or bibliographic codes. In this way, the

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397 Robert Essick, “Blake’s Engravings to *The Book of Job*, with an essay on their graphic form, with a catalogue of their states and printings” in *William Blake’s Illustrations of the Book of Job*, ed. David Bindman (London: William Blake Trust, 1987), pp.35 – 101 (p.44).

398 “Their esoteric doctrines are the most spontaneous and independent thoughts of each and every of their members; their secret watchwords are the most free and public expressions of their members; their mysterious signals are telegraphed in the most careless gestures which all eyes may see. The watchwords and symbols change from generation to generation, the supreme secrets are immutable from the beginning to the end of Time” (“Open Secret Societies” p.99).

399 “If, however, these poems be read silently in books, instead of being heard chanted by the human voice, then for the eye which has vision an underlight stirs and quickens among the letters, which grow translucent and throb with life” (“Open Secret Societies”, p.134).

bibliographic reproduction of Blake's works constructs an "open secret society" amongst the aesthetic devotees of Blake enthusiasts. A certain aesthetic elitism seems to be suggested by this nod and wink towards Blake. Artists and poets as the patrician class, recognising the sovereign figure of Blake, the lone bard surviving in the isolated figure of a textual fragment taken from *Jerusalem*.

However, the anonymous creator of the graphic designs uses the mirror of technical reproduction to breakdown aesthetic hierarchies. So who was the anonymous secular artisan? Although the 1881 pamphlet has no clues as to illustrator, printer or publisher, there are many paths that converge between the facsimilist of the 1863 edition of Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* and the illustrator of the 1881 pamphlet in celebration of the *Address on the Opening of the New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society*. One of the most telling correspondences between the two is the similarity of the tailpieces for Gilchrist's *Life*, and for the 1881 pamphlet. However, the connection between the facsimiles in the *Life* and the 1881 pamphlet are complicated by the inclusion of Linton's woodcuts in the 1863 edition of the *Life*, together with photolithographs by another artist of the entire *Job* series. Robert F. Gleckner provides us with vital information regarding *Job*, Gilchrist's *Life* and W.J. Linton.<sup>400</sup> Confusion arose for Rossetti and Anne Gilchrist concerning the woodcuts and photolithographs,<sup>401</sup> before a compromise between the artisan craft of engraving and the progressive technology of

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400 Robert F. Gleckner, "W. J. Linton's Tailpieces in Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*" in *Blake: an illustrated quarterly* 14 (1981), pp.208 – 211 (p.208): "Else where in Gilchrist we have Linton's wood engraving of *Job* Plates 5, 8, and 14 (all full-page, the last excluding Blake's border designs except for the corner angels), the top half of the border design of Plate 18, and the circular part of the main boxed design of Plate 15. From Rossetti's correspondence with Anne Gilchrist (who had taken over editing of the *Life* at the death of her husband) as the volumes were nearing completion, we learn that, despite their plans to include photolithographs of the entire *Job* series, Linton (who had been part of the project as early as 1861 and, one would presume, knew about the photolithography idea) went ahead and executed his own wood engravings of the entire series".

401 "When Linton sent Rossetti the (apparently) final list of illustrations to the volumes, then, and included in it all his copies of the *Jobs*, Rossetti was in a quandary about what to do with them since the photolithographs were ready to go. He quickly wrote Mrs. Gilchrist: 'I see he [Linton] includes the *Job*

print was reached.<sup>402</sup> As will be apparent, the confusion over the Gilchrist *Jobs* also leads to some confusion over the links between Linton and the Secular Hall pamphlet. However, there is one figure who is identical between the *Life* (in both the 1863 and 1881 editions) and the Secular Hall pamphlet. This is the figure of the shepherd boy from *Jerusalem*, plate 9, which appears as a tailpiece upon page fifty of the *Life*. At this point in *The Life of William Blake*, William Blake, the original author and creator of the shepherd boy, is reflected upon in Gilchrist's biography as an original and isolated outsider.<sup>403</sup> The author has become the reflection of his own work. But this mirror is deceptive. Not only is it possible that the Secular Hall pamphlet shows us the reflection of a poet other than Blake, the secular mirror is not actually reflecting the ritual production of Blake's art, or the "sacred aura" of Blake's original.

I am going to speculate on the story of the Secular Hall pamphlet. One of the arguments against Linton's involvement in the illustrations to the Secular Hall pamphlet is that he was no longer living in England in 1881. Linton left England in August 1866 (*Radical Artisan*, p.151), and was to die in New Haven on 29th December 1897 (*Radical Artisan*, p.215). However, Linton returned to England in the period 1882 – 1884 (*Radical Artisan*, p.203). 1882 was the year of James Thomson's death. It is possible that the *Job/ Jerusalem* illustrations in the Secular Hall pamphlet may, more than anything, be Linton's memorial to Thomson, created after his death while Linton was still in

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Plates which he copied, in spite of the photolithographs which might be considered to supersede them" (Gleckner, "W.J. Linton's Tailpieces", p.210).

402 "What finally emerged is clearly a kind of compromise, Linton no doubt insisting that at least some of his *Jobs* be included even along with the full photolithographed set, Rossetti urging Mrs. Gilchrist (in the letter just quoted) that 'it seemed a pity to leave them out after the trouble and expense.' Why all the rest of Linton's *Jobs* that were included, piecemeal, as tailpieces turn out to be one, Plate 12, I cannot say. Perhaps that plate was, simply, one of his favourites; perhaps, even more simply, it was the only other one that he actually engraved" (Gleckner, "W.J. Linton's Tailpieces", p.210).

403 "One readily understands that on more intimate acquaintance, when it was discovered by well-regulated minds that the erratic Bard perversely came to teach, not to be taught, nor to be gently schooled into imitative proprieties and condescendingly patted on the back, he became less acceptable to the polite world at No.27, than when first started as a prodigy in that elegant arena (*Life* 1863, I, p.50).

England. The problem in proving or disproving this hypothesis is compounded by the total lack of publication details in the pamphlet itself. However, the existence of a far plainer printed version of the address in the records of the Leicester Secular Society suggests that the elaborate facsimiles of *Job* and *Jerusalem* might well have been later creations. Also, the type of date stamp used in the British Library copy of the pamphlet was introduced between 25th March and 3rd April 1929. Consequently the pamphlet can not have been procured by the library until this century i.e. not at the point of its publication. The catalogue date of publication is bracketed, indicating that the date of publication is only a supposition, probably based on the date of the original address. Therefore, it is perfectly possible that the pamphlet was not produced until a date later than 1881. If we accept this suggested recontextualisation of the *Job* version of the Secular Hall pamphlet, then the graphic text takes on a new symbolic weight. The little shepherd boy who stands at the end of Thomson's address is a romanticised and isolated figure, akin to that "weary wanderer/ In that same city of tremendous night", who "Will understand the speech, and feel a stir/ Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight" (*City of Dreadful Night*, p.3). Blake's design has become a melancholy figure of textual reflection, serving as a silent comment both on the tragedy of James Thomson's life and the failure of secularism and humanism to prevent the alienation and isolation that haunted the Godless self. So far, so pessimistic: an aesthetic triumphant but a humanist failure.

But what if the lone figure at the end of the Secular Hall pamphlet is not representative of humanity's isolation but celebrates a hero of the secular community? When George William Foote was sentenced for blasphemy on 26th February 1883 to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour, the severity of the sentence caused outrage. Foote became a secular martyr (Walter, *Blasphemy: ancient & modern*, pp.49 – 55).

The little figure at the end of the Secular Hall pamphlet, when seen as a comment on the secular bard, the freethought voice of truth, is revitalised. To deconstruct aesthetic images in order to reconstruct a discourse of social and political cause would particularly appeal to Foote. Joss Marsh has commented on Foote's campaign to dismantled the aesthetic strongholds of theological didacticism. Marsh writes of Foote's campaign that he sought "[...] to deconstruct and desacralize the bible [...] to forge a new language stripped of biblical resonance".<sup>404</sup> To reclaim the word was Foote's mission.

If someone was to reissue verse celebrating freethought in support of the martyred Foote, if they were to reforge a discourse out of past visions, they could do worse than the Secular Hall Pamphlet with its Job illustrations: Job the patient recipient of a wrathful, dictorial God; the little shepherd boy, an isolated figure refusing to stop playing his seditious song. Blake's work becoming a cartoon: a double bluff blasphemy. That Linton could have had a part is fully possible. He was in England for the whole of 1883, and although he was not a secularist, he had a great liking for Charles Bradlaugh, who particularly supported Foote.

It is also possible that one of the most notorious forgers of rare books in the nineteenth century had a hand in the production of the pamphlet. Harry Buxton Forman, together with his partner in crime, Thomas Wise, first started on the dubious course of illegal printing in 1887. Wise's motivation is pretty clear. He is described as "a crusty old capitalist".<sup>405</sup> Buxton Forman is not so easy to fathom. A man of peculiar literary talents

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404 Joss Lutz Marsh, "Bibliolatry' and 'Bible-Smashing': G.W. Foote, George Meredith, and the Heretic Trope of the Book" in *Victorian Studies* 34 (1991), pp.315 – 36 (p.320).

405 James Collins, *The Two Forgers: a biography of Harry Buxton Forman & Thomas James Wise* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), p.237.

and sensitivities, as we have seen, he edited Shelley to a rigorous standard and was an avid collector of books, a bibliographer. His involvement in full scale forgery always seems somewhat strange.

Unless the forgeries were a corruption of a project far more in line with Foote's "cultural terrorism", the breaking and re-making of cultural artefacts, of the sacred aura. Buxton Forman, like Foote, was a freethinker. He met his wife at a positivist lecture and his sympathy with freethinking ideals, particularly Comte's positivism, has been described as "intense in youth", an enduring influence throughout his whole life (*Two Forgers* 1992, pp.33 - 6). He also had connections with Linton and a taste for Blake. In a study of Thomas Wise and H.B. Forman, James Collins lists works of Blake in the sale catalogue of Forman's library, with works listed by both Blake and Linton.<sup>406</sup> Collins also cites letters of Blake in Forman's possession: "[...] four Blake letters and what was thought to be his poem *Genesis, The seven days of the created world* (it is in his hand but proves to be a transcription of Hayley's translation of Tasso)". Then there is surprising information concerning Blake's *Job*: "[...] and what are said to be (but cannot be) twelve original copper plates for Blake's *Job* 'with a set of impressions pulled recently'" (*Two Forgers*, p.213 - 14). It is almost impossible that the copper plates are "original", but it is worth speculating on what they may be. William James Linton was a friend and associate of Forman. In that association a taint of Harry Buxton Forman's other "bibliographical" activity – forgery (*Radical Artisan*, p.203) - may have attached itself to Linton. Even if Linton did not act in collaboration with Buxton Forman, there is another link between Buxton Forman and the *Jobs* of Gilchrist's *Life*. In the second edition of 1880, the *Job* plates are listed as being reproduced by photo-

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406 "The books are a remarkable assemblage. One notices many complete (or nearly complete) collections with fine showings of Coventry Patmore, Gray, Peacock, Blake, Whitman, Kipling, Lander,

intaligo method and printed by the Typographic Etching Company. The Typographic Etching Company was at the forefront of the “photomechanical revolution” in Victorian book illustration, exhibiting relief blocks made by photomechanical methods at the Caxton Centenary Exhibition in 1877.<sup>407</sup> Buxton Forman used the Typographic Etching Company to print his 1873 edition of Shelley, and would have had contacts within the company. Could the facsimile plates have been spirited away to the atheist forger? And did Buxton Forman embark on forgery originally conceived as practical deconstruction, an anarchical reprinting of culture, mixing new and old technologies, reclaiming a freethinking past? If so, how does that change our conception of facsimile and forgeries of Blake in the nineteenth century?

All of these questions are reflected straight back at the reader/viewer/critic when we realise that the pamphlet designs are not just a comment on secular discourse but on technical process. On closer examination of the pamphlet marginalia, it becomes evident that the model for the illustrations is not Linton’s 1863 facsimile, nor the 1880 photo-intaligos, nor a Blake original. The model is the 1863 photolithographs in Volume II of Gilchrist’s *Life*, copied down to the mistakes. The reproduction of plate 8 as the border to the text of Thomson’s poem text has, on the right hand corner a double line, a thickening of the plant stems creeping up the side of the plate. This is lacking in the 1880 copies and the 1825 original and also Linton’s facsimile. But the double line is present in the 1863 photolithographs. The evidence becomes indisputable when we look at the title-page of the *Address on the Opening of the New Hall of the Leicester Secular Society*. In the top left hand corner there is a mark, extending out of the curving branches, which, on closer examination, is obviously not part of the design, but a mark.

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Hawker of Morwenstow, Leigh Hunt, Felicia Hemans, Chatterton, Waller, Byron, W.S. Gilbert, H.G. Wells, W.J. Linton and William Godwin” (*Two Forgers*, p.213).

407 Geoffrey Wakeman, *Victorian Book Illustration: the technical revolution* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), p.134.



perhaps of a slipped burin or tracing stylus, on the plate. Only the 1863 photolithographs have this mark present (*figure 28* and *figure 28a*). The obvious explanation is that the same plates were used for production of the Secular Hall pamphlet and the 1863 facsimiles. But this does not quite add up. Firstly, there is too much discrepancy in the size of the plates to credit the idea that the same plates were used, and secondly, a thorough scrutiny of other details finds them to be extremely close, but not exactly the same. For instance the grass and clustered vegetation in the bottom left hand corner is far more defined in the 1863 edition. However, the 1863 facsimiles seem to have been the definite model for the post 1881 pamphlet. Could the 1881 facsimilist have innocently transcribed the “mistake” as part of the design? Possible, but an artist’s eye would argue that anyone who had the artistic and technical sensibility to execute the effective Secular Hall pamphlet illustrations, would realise the symmetry of the plate was being disrupted by the extra branch.<sup>408</sup>

There is no conclusive evidence as to who executed the designs for the Secular Hall pamphlet. What we can say, however, on the balance of probabilities is that there is a deliberateness on the part of the facsimilist to incorporate imperfection into the aesthetic production. The ability to reproduce induces imperfection and reproduction, in turn, becomes caught up in criticism. Imperfection makes visible the muddy fingerprints on the aesthetic ideal, the necessary mark of aesthetic mortality.

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408 I would like to thank Nathan Parker for making this argument to me.



figure 28

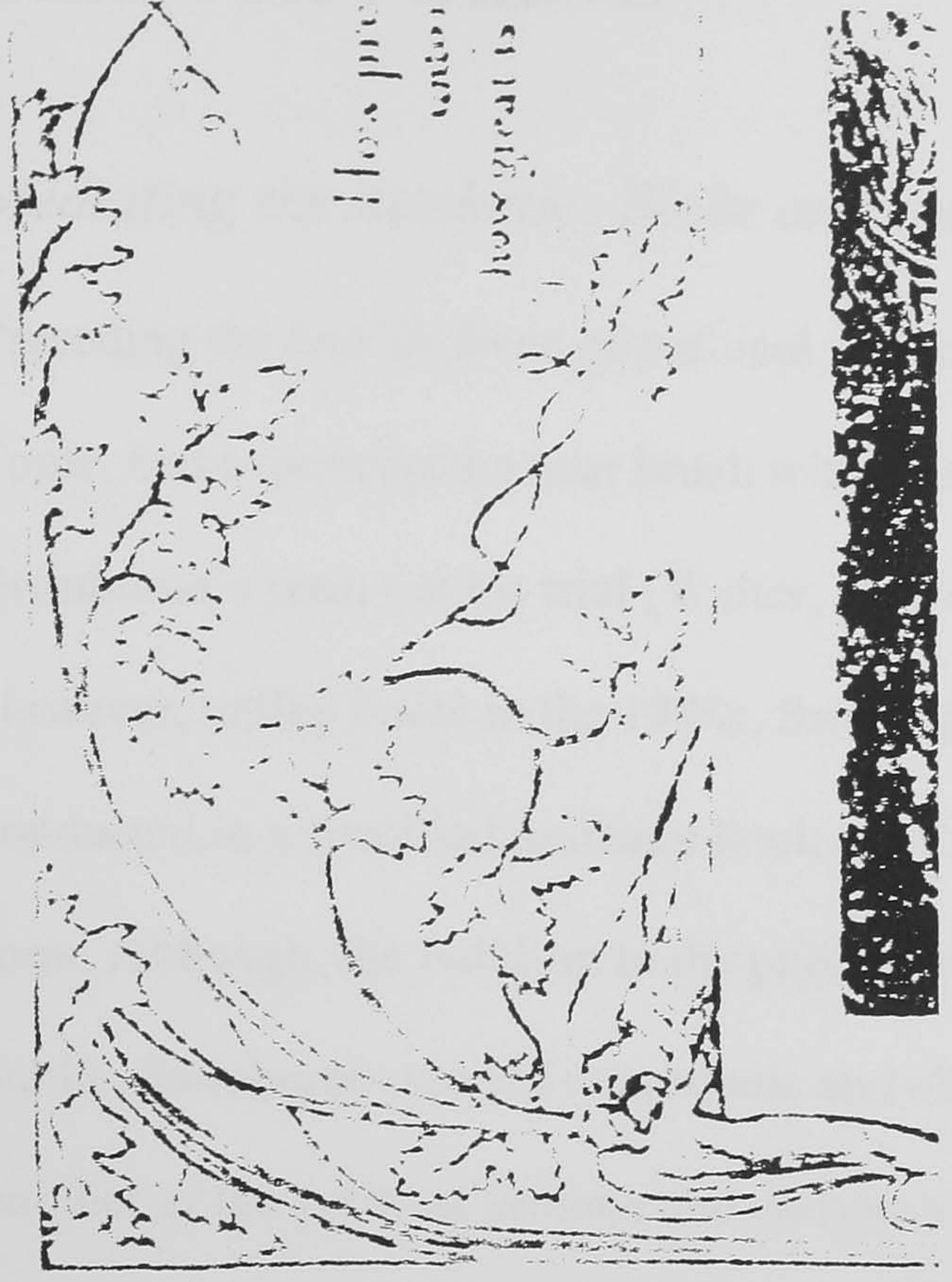


figure 28a

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *Mediating the Aesthetic: Blake and the Audience*

Preceding the *tour de force* of political aestheticism in *William Blake*, Swinburne, like Foote, had experienced a near brush with blasphemy. Foote actually quoted from Swinburne's poetry at his trial (Walter, *Blasphemy: ancient & modern*, pp.53 – 55). However, unlike Foote in the 1880s, Swinburne's blasphemous utterances were conducted in a specified aesthetic book form rather than an explicitly political periodical form. Although, the build-up to the publication of *William Blake* was political and public, Swinburne was led to aesthetic and elitist conclusions. Swinburne starts as a prophet of the political profane and ends as a defender of the mystical Absolute, holed-up in an aesthetic temple, besieged by the masses. Poetry is the apex of absolute criticizability and the poet is the highest order of critic. The published work is critically contaminated and the publisher is a contemporary Mephistopheles, a devil of abstraction, divorced from the work of the text:

The selection must of necessity have been to a certain degree straitened and limited by many minor and temporary considerations: publishers, tasters, and such-like, must have fingered the work here and there, snuffing at this and nibbling at that as their manner is. For the work and workman have yet their way to make in the judicious reading world; and so long as they have, they are more or less in the lax limp clutch of that "dieu ganache des bourgeois" who sits nodding and ponderously dormant in the dust of publishing offices, ready at any jog of the elbow to snarl and start - a new Pan, feeding on the pastures of a fat and foggy land his Arcadian herds of review or magazine.

[...]

Arcadian virtue and Boeotian brain, under the presidency of such a stertorous and splenetic goat-god, given to be sleepy in broadest noonday, are not the best crucibles for art to be tried in. (AS, p.111)

Irony upon irony is encapsulated in the above passage. Swinburne's comments at this point pull *William Blake: a critical essay* into the widening gyre of his own vitriolic discourse with publishing institutions in 1868. The vitriol is cast backwards, but, as we shall see, also came to be flung at the publisher who had actually published the words of condemnation in Swinburne's *William Blake: a critical essay*. The story up until 1868 has been well documented by Swinburne's biographers. Jean Overton Fuller picks up the thread in 1866, describing the anxiety that the fantastical combination of erotica and blasphemy in some of the poems caused the publishers: "The publishers were extremely nervous, not entirely without reason, since they had the year previously, been prosecuted for issuing a reprint of Shelley's atheistic poem *Queen Mab*. Because of this nervousness, they had insisted on the prior issue of a limited edition, as a test, of *Laus Veneris*. [...] Swinburne's treatment of the legend, however, contained some dangerous lines: 'Lo, she was thus when her clear limbs enticed/ All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ'".<sup>409</sup> But it was not so much a single poem as the bibliographical company it was keeping, that tipped the balance against *Poems and Ballads*: "When the poem appeared as a small separate pamphlet, little notice was taken, but when it reappeared, in the company of so many other startling poems, in the more sizeable *Poems and Ballads*, the reaction was immediate. On August 4, the *Saturday Review*, in a long and deprecating notice of the book, referred to the author as 'the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs'. On the same date hostile reviews appeared also in the *London Review* and *The Athenæum*". The critical discourse circulating at the time

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409 Jean Overton Fuller, *Swinburne: a critical biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p.151.

unsettled the publishing house even more: "During the next week events moved to a climax. Word became current that a worse review yet was to appear in *The Times* and that the publisher as well as the author would be held up to execration. According to the memoirs of a certain Sir William Hardman, the article was actually set up in type when a 'private hint was given to Moxon, in order that he might, if so inclined, disconnect himself from the bawdry'. Rossetti calling at Moxon's, found Payne, now the general manager, in a state of panic and only too anxious to dissociate himself from the publication" (*Swinburne*, p.153 – 4). For Swinburne, the bibliographical sanctity of *Poems and Ballads* had to stand in all its blasphemous glory:

But now to alter my course or mutilate my published work, seems to me somewhat like deserting one's colours. One may or may not repent having enlisted, but to lay down one's arms except under compulsion, remains intolerable. Even if I did not feel the matter in this way, my withdrawal would not undo what has been done, nor unsay what has been said.<sup>410</sup>

Swinburne describes the integrity of *Poems and Ballads* in terms of a holy war, with the publisher fulfilling the role of a whore of Babylon, perverting and suppressing authorial word in publication. It was at this point of crisis that John Camden Hotten presented himself as an alternative publisher.<sup>411</sup> In the autumn of 1866, Swinburne transferred all his publishing interests to Hotten, including *William Blake: a critical essay*.<sup>412</sup> Swinburne's relationship with Hotten was soon to be soured. History has received Hotten as at best a bit of a chancer, and at worst, a shark and literary pimp. Such vignettes of Hotten are titillating caricatures but they have nothing to add to any critical

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410 Letter to Lord Lytton, 13th August 1866 (*Swin. Letts.*, I, pp.172 – 173).

411 Letter to Charles Augustus Howell, 20th August 1866 (*Swin. Letts.*, I, p.175).

412 Letter to J.C. Hotten, 4th September 1866 (*Swin. Letts.*, I, p.181).

insight into the mid-century Blake interest, such as the role of the publisher, copyright, the relationship with the audience, and ultimately, the status of the book. Hotten has something to say on all these matters, and is an interesting figure in his extreme illumination of the publisher as mediator between author and audience. It is true as Morton D. Paley tells us that "Hotten was indeed a publisher of what was called 'tabooed literature'". As regards the publication of this erotica, Hotten was involved in the false dating and false numbering of certain works. Along with this "[...]Hotten also had a reputation as a publisher who dealt fast and loose with copyright" (Paley, "John Camden Hotten", pp.261 - 3). Swinburne felt a growing enmity towards the publisher who had rescued him from the "presidency stertorous and splenetic goat-god" of Moxon's in 1866. Paley discounts the idea that disputes over royalties were at the heart of Swinburne's animus towards Hotten. Instead he puts forward the more interesting idea that "[i]t was Hotten's misfortune to have possessed relics of that past life [Swinburne's sado-masochistic literature] in the form of manuscripts which Swinburne had given him". As Paley then demonstrates, Hotten seemed to be unaware of this possession himself and "[t]he explanation seems to lie not in Hotten's actions but in Swinburne's imagination" (Paley, "John Camden Hotten", pp.266 - 8). What is interesting about this snippet from literary history, from the perspective of Blake and the Book in the mid-century revival, is the emphasis that Swinburne, poet and prophet of the Universal Republic, places on possession. The fear of, and venom against, the publisher - unlike the celebration of the editor in Swinburne's work - is motivated by a fear of dispossession. In this juncture between author and publisher, those questioning relationships that have haunted this study of Blake in the nineteenth century return: the relationship between self and community, between the aesthetic and the material, between mystical work and secular commodity. Two metanarratives loom over the relationship of author and publisher, one leaning towards the practical, the other veering

towards the philosophical: copyright and the idea of the audience, or to put it another way, owners and readers.

It is at this point that John Camden Hotten emerges as the unexpected champion of the people. Despite the obvious benefits to himself as a publisher, Hotten's argument in his seven letters on literary copyright is simple and direct in its defence of the public as the true inheritors of literary wealth: "It seems, in fact, to have been forgotten for the moment that the public are the reversioners of literary property".<sup>413</sup> In contrast to Swinburne's spiritual configuration of the work of art, Hotten writes of the work of art as simply another form of labour, of literature as simply a profession:

With the alleged anomaly of limiting a man's right to the work of his brain, while, as it is sometimes expressed, the work of his hands is his, and his heirs for ever, I have nothing to do. But it is certainly a mistake to assume that literary property is the only kind on which the Legislature imposes special limitations. The case of Inventors, whatever has been said to the contrary, is strictly analogous: and every tax on a profession, or impost on the productions of any particular kind of industry, is but another illustration of the assumed competency of the Legislature to prescribe, in the public interest, the conditions on which men shall labour, always provided that no one shall be constrained to adopt any calling which is the subject of a special burden, or denied any privilege accorded to others. For the case of genius it is, of course, difficult to legislate: but in modern times literature is, as a rule, simply a profession. If the writers of books, therefore, should think themselves unfairly treated by the Legislature, it is,

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<sup>413</sup> John Camden Hotten, *Literary Copyright: seven letters addressed by permission to the right hon. the Earl Stanhope* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1871), p.34.

perhaps, sufficient for the Legislature to answer, that no man need write books unless he pleases. (*Seven Letters*, pp.vii – ix)

If Hotten's position seems to strip the work of spirit, of its sovereign status, then we should remember that it also serves to return literature to a point of crystallisation and communication. The writing of books, the production of literature, is part of the economy of social communication. Swinburne's talk of temples and of spirit may touch us more, but Hotten's hard-nosed practicalities are the stuff of a literary democracy. Publication may kill the legal sovereignty of an author's work, but it returns the work to the chain of communication in which the work becomes universal. For Paul Ricoeur, the universalisation of the textual message in print culture does not signal the death of the work's spirit, but rather its liberation: "This universalisation of the audience is one of the more striking effects of writing and may be expressed in terms of a paradox. Because discourse is now linked to a material support, it becomes more spiritual in the sense that it is liberated from the narrowness of the face-to-face situation".<sup>414</sup>

Paul Ricoeur's schema of interpretation seems to lead to an apparent open-endedness as regards the dialogical situation of the reader and author separated in time. The text is sent out into the unknown, and the reader becomes a vague point in a far removed, ever-receding dialogue of universalisation. Ricoeur's interpretation theory entails an idea of a text produced as a specific form, but in terms of constitutive codes rather than its physical presence. McGann's textual materialist argument is imbedded in the material artefact. Ricoeur's is liberated by "distanciation".<sup>415</sup> Something happens at the reader's end of the textual spectrum that defies the text's and the author's sovereignty. It is this

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414 Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p.31.

415 See Steve Clark, *Paul Ricoeur* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.108.



defying, this unexploded bomb of the reader's wilful misunderstanding, that surpasses Swinburne's joy as a poet-editor and verve as a critic. It is what, perversely and bizarrely, turns Swinburne's relationship with Blake's poetry into one of material possession and religious orthodoxy:

After two readings of 'Tiriël' in print I am inclined to regret his public appearance. It is not nearly so 'mad' as many spectres and emanations of the author's mind, but it is much more liable to the term which I cannot get out of my head in reading it - 'silly' - than any. It should have been preserved, certainly, but strictly for the inspection of esoteric Blakists - never to be exposed to the eyes of Saducees, neophytes, weak brethren, - worshippers in the court of the Gentiles; whose faith may (not improbably) be shaken by its perusal, and their poor souls in consequence eternally lost; which result I do think you were bound in common Blakian charity (He would have said Christian, but I won't) to take into consideration. Speaking from the severely orthodox (not to say High Church or even Ultra-montane) point of view which I humbly presume the *first* (apostolic or patristic) commentator on *Jerusalem* has a right to take. I cannot but say I would rather this book had remained in the Apocrypha than been inscribed in the canon - that is, in the roll of those books 'which whosoever believeth not, without doubt' etc. etc.<sup>416</sup>

It is hard to come away from reading this letter, placed in conjunction with Swinburne's earlier comments concerning Blake's works representing the Universal Republic, without wondering whether Swinburne is a literary and poetic schizophrenic. Blake's illuminated works may well represent "the unity and indivisibility (as of the Republic

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416 Letter to William Michael Rossetti, 30th October 1874 (*Swin. Letts.*, II, p.348).

itself)”, but the Republic is not to be trusted with interpreting its own material representation. Swinburne reverts to the language of moral law, and designates Blake’s works as Apocrypha, before relinquishing a work such as *Tiriel* to the unbelieving public. Swinburne’s tongue is probably quite firmly in his cheek when he appropriates Biblical dictums, but his desire to censor the publication of Blake’s works is driven by a religious fervour, bordering on fanatical devotion to the “relics of another man’s work”.

Swinburne positions himself as a prophet in the Blake revival - “the *first* (apostolic or patristic) commentator”, St John the Baptist crying in the wilderness. To engage with Blake’s works is to engage with a religion of dissent, to become the blasphemer, the transgressor. For Swinburne, this state of engagement requires the reader to enter the inner experience of the work, to become a “student of Bowlahoola” rather than simply a reader. Swinburne’s distrust of the public in reading Blake is rooted in part in a distrust of communal literature, rather than a disbelief in a literary community. Swinburne, in his religious devotion to the ritual interpretation of Blake is anticipating Walter Benjamin’s theories regarding art and the masses (*Work of Art*, p.218). The move from ritual to politics would seem to be one Swinburne the blasphemer would appreciate. But it is Walter Benjamin’s description of the bifurcation of politics from consciousness, of the masses from imaginative volition, that Swinburne is already rejecting in his dismissal of the public in the technical reproduction of Blake’s works (*Work of Art*, pp.232 – 3). The distracted reader is what Swinburne abhors above all. The problem is that too many selves may bring their disengaged perspectives to the work of art, until it becomes swallowed in disparate self-perception. To limit the fragmentation of Blake’s works in the grinding wheels of technical reproducibility (and mechanical reproduction’s progeny, the mass audience), Swinburne seeks to place Blake in the nineteenth century within ever-decreasing circles of readership. The necessary evil of

publication is at the furthest extreme. The inner circle of the Blake revival is the circle of hermeneutics, the house of the interpreter. This is the limit of reproduction, where the material presence of Blake's self may be preserved and read by the devout poet-students, worshipping in the aesthetic church. For John Camden Hotten, this is all the wrong way round. The limit of reproduction does not begin with authorial possession but with communal interest:

Let us imagine that our population were divided into two equal parts under separate government, and that no reciprocal copyright existed between them; is it not abundantly clear that although on each side some unlucky author's labour might occasionally be got for nothing, on the whole literature must decline, and the community be injured in one of its most important interests? Among the many great advantages derived from the co-operation of great numbers, there is, perhaps, none more important than the motive which is thus afforded for literary labour. (*Seven Letters*, p.107)

John Camden Hotten's voice at this point is an invaluable reminder that the mass reception of literature is an active process of reproduction. The public is a force not only of reception but also of reproduction. There is not only an individual consciousness but a mass consciousness involved in the production of a work of art. The public does not exhibit only an apperceptive consciousness in the chain of communication, which Ricoeur sees as forming the textual message. The public role in the work of art, in the work of literature reproduced, involves also a multi-faceted social and political consciousness. In Hotten's argument, the publisher mediates between the spheres of original and reproduction, of individual author and mass public, of esoteric and communal consciousness. The publisher is the mediator of technical reproducibility to

the public. This is a role that Blake himself did not shun, and strove to fulfil: "The Labours of the Artist, the Poet, the Musician, have been proverbially attended by poverty and obscurity; this was never the fault of the Public, but was owing to a neglect of means to propagate such works as have wholly absorbed the Man of Genius. Even Milton and Shakespeare could not publish their own works. This difficulty has been obviated by the Author of the following productions now presented to the Public" (*To the Public*, E692). The irony of Blake's triumphant heralding of his works "given to the Public" is that his production methods limited the potential audience during his lifetime. But it is the potentiality of the universal public that is important here: "A work also creates its public. In this way it enlarges the circle of communication and properly initiates new modes of communication. To that extent, the recognition of the work by the audience created by the work is an unpredictable event" (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p.31).

What Ricoeur creates in the equation of potential universality and social patterns of reading, might be dubbed a chaos theory of textual transmission. It is known and understood that there are certain factors at play in the reproduction and reception of texts, these factors being social, political, historical etc. But there is no sure way of predicting how these factors will form themselves into patterns of readership or reproduction. When Blake puts before the public his work, produced by his unique method, published through the artisan ingenuity of technical reproduction, he is also opening the doors of technology to his work. By the end of the nineteenth century, new technology was reproducing Blake's work in an unpredictable capacity, to an audience that Blake could not have foreseen:

Many of the audience must have thought they had never seen such strange pictures as Mr A. J. Essex exhibited on the lantern-sheet last Sunday evening, at the Leicester Secular Hall. The pictures were photographic reproductions from the drawings of William Blake (born 1757, died 1827). [...] Mr F. J. Gould, whose lecture on Blake's life and work formed a commentary on the pictures, observed that he admired the drawings without endorsing their suggested doctrines of the soul and resurrection. William Blake's genius was not recognised in his lifetime, but thanks to the efforts of Rossetti, Swinburne and Gilchrist, the public were becoming slowly aware of the remarkable gift which Blake displayed as an artist and a poet. But not before this occasion, Mr. Gould believed, had any of Blake's designs been projected on to the magic-lantern screen.<sup>417</sup>

This journalistic fragment from the turn of the century picks up many of the threads running through the Blake revival of the nineteenth century. Rossetti, Swinburne and Gilchrist are there as the progenitors of the revival. Blake's mysticism - "doctrines of the soul and resurrection" - are again caught up with a Secular audience. And reproductive technology both widens Blake's universal potential and changes that potential. The audience in the Secular Hall experience a wonderful conjunction of two unusual and "magical" technologies - Blake's relief etching and the magic lantern show.

A poetic analogy for the historical continuum of textual hermeneutics would be Blake's own re-writing of *Paradise Lost* in *Milton*, where the Lark is the messenger of the poet Los:

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417 From an unsigned review, "Strange Pictures at the Secular Hall" in *Guardian*, Oct. 10th 1900, from the newspaper cuttings book of the Leicester Secular Society.

But the Larks Nest is at the gate of Los, at the eastern  
 Gate of wide Golgonooza & the Lark is Los's Messenger.  
 When on the highest lift of his light pinions he arrives  
 At that bright Gate. another Lark meets him & back to back  
 They touch their pinions tip tip: and each descend  
 To their respective Earths & there all night consult with Angels  
 Of Providence & with the Eyes of God all night in slumbers  
 Inspired: & at the dawn of day send out another Lark  
 Into another Heaven to carry news upon his wings  
 (*M* 35[39]:66 – 67: 36[40]:1 – 7, E136)

The poetic message is conveyed through touch, a very human analogy. At the same time a multitude of reading worlds are invoked - "each descend/ To their respective Earths". Moments of touch within those worlds start another chain of communication. But there is a paradox in Blake's fantastical flight of the Lark as the transmitter of the poetic message. And this lies not in the mythical language of inspiration but in the intimacy of transmission.

In *Milton*, when the flight of the Larks is over, Los, the labourer-poet joins Blake and takes him in his "firy whirlwind" (*M* 36[40]:21, E137). The reader and Blake enter on the final journey in *Milton*. In the conclusion of *Milton*, after Milton's redemption of contraries, the Lark returns. Only this time it sings in the daytime of a recognisable England, rather than sleeps in the mythological landscape of the Ancients:

Immediately the Lark mounted with a loud thrill from Felpham's Vale,  
 And the Wild Thyme from Wimbletons green & impurpled Hills.

And Los & Enitharmon rose over the Hills of Surrey  
Their clouds roll over London with a south wind, soft Oothoon  
Pants in the Vales of Lambeth weeping o'er her Human Harvest.  
Los listens to the Cry of the Poor Man: his Cloud  
Over London in volume terrific, low bended in anger.  
(*M* 42[49]:29 – 35, E143 – 4)

The poetic message of the Lark is suddenly in the now of London and Lambeth. The poet-labourer is united with the voice of the poor man. It is this widening of the textual scene from the personal mythology of the author to the public space of the contemporary city, that holds so many keys to understanding Blake in the nineteenth century, and questions of textual transmission in general. Paul Ricoeur theoretically shows that the text has two beginnings and two ends, that multiple readings are intimately bound to the semantic autonomy of the text. Blake shows us that the semantic autonomy of the textual message can literally sing to the public within a work of art.

The story of Blake in the nineteenth century is the story of the text's song and the work's labour. Textual hermeneutics converge with the technical reproducibility of the work. But the power of the song, of language - visual or oral - should not be underestimated in the textual transmission of Blake's works in the nineteenth century. Blake's unique poetic language, drawn from an eclectic mix of Gnosticism, mysticism, republicanism and dissent, is the sovereign song of his work. Something extraordinary within that song touches the Blake revivalists from Algernon Charles Swinburne to William James Linton, from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Joseph Skipsey. Something in the language of Blake's poetry prepossesses the work, which seems so intrinsic to Blake's poetic imagination, to crystallise into the consciousness of Others. There are specific reasons why Blake spoke so poignantly and vibrantly to the secular, mystical

tangle of Victorian self-hood. But the reason that poetry so apparently esoteric spoke to the self-possessed Victorians is the reason that Blake continues to have meaning - semantic autonomy, if you like - to the dispossessed culture of today. The very sovereignty of Blake's work is the very liberty of his poetry. The esoteric, imaginative language of Blake's text marks out a voice speaking from the margins, a transgressive song played in a political key.



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