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Blake and Influence

Abstract: This paper which commissioned for an exhibition entitled Blake and Sons at the Glucksmann Gallery, Cork. The paper reflects on the continuing influence of Blake, and contrasts that still significant influence with a conspicuous lack of readership for his major works.

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Keywords: William Blake. Contemporary Art. Influence. Romantic Studies. Literary Theory. Cultural Theory.

An exhibition entitled *Blake and Sons* returns us to the question and, we might add, the enigma of Blake's influence. That Blake has had a huge influence in the professional realms of literature and the fine arts is beyond dispute. He is also one of the handful of British poets and painters who has a truly popular presence within the wider social and cultural arena. Blake is, as his great modern biographer, Peter Ackroyd, so wonderfully demonstrates, the unrivalled poet and prophet of London.[i] The permanent collection of his work in what is nowadays called Tate Britain draws people from all over the world everyday. The gigantic statue by Eduardo Paolozzi reproducing his painting "Newton" in the piazza of the new British Library is a monumental testament to Blake's cultural importance for that particular capital city. *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* continues to be, for countless schoolchildren, one of their first experiences of poetry. The poem which prefaces some of the copies of Blake's 1804-9 illuminated masterpiece, *Milton: A Poem in 2 Books*, wrongly known as "Jerusalem," is still ranked

by many (with its musical arrangement by C. Hubert H. Parry) as one of England's two unofficial national anthems.[ii] It is sung every year (with Elgar's orchestration of Parry's music) as the climax of the last night of the Proms and recently became the focal point for the national hysteria over the English cricket team's defeat of the Australians and consequent regaining of the Ashes. The BCC's web-site throughout the five days of the fifth decisive test match directed its readers to the text of Blake's poem. One wonders, however, how many of the poem's numerous singers take the time to consider the words they are singing. The poem, like *Milton* itself, is about influence and it argues, or at least poses the question, whether Christ himself came to England, a place Blake more frequently refers to as Albion. Before the poem which prefaces Blake's epic poem, there is a prose "Preface" to which the poem is a conclusion. Blake writes there:

> Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court, & the University: who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! on you I call! Sculptors! Architects! Suffer not the fash[i]onable Fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works or the expensive advertising boasts that they make of such works; believe Christ & his Apostles that there is a Class of Men whose whole delight is in Destroying.[iii]

Stirring words even today, and words which remind us that the "Mental War" Blake commits himself to in the poem and which he urges us to commit ourselves to concerns a conflict with a "Class of Men" who can, in today's parlance, best be described as

bureaucrats. The last two lines of the poem's second and fourth stanzas are of course particularly memorable in the kinds of nationalistic contexts in which they have come to be employed:

> And was Jerusalem builded here,
> Among these dark Satanic Mills?

I cite the entire last (fourth) stanza:

> I will not cease from Mental Fight,
> Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
> Till we have built Jerusalem,
> In Englands green & pleasant Land.

These lines are often taken as an endorsement of the pastoral ideal which England has for a millennium or so projected about itself; and yet for Blake the "mental strife" he commits himself to concerns the apocalyptic and revolutionary responsibility of building the New Jerusalem, a glorious city he was to call Golgonooza, *on* England's "green & pleasant Land." Blake was no Romantic nature poet like Wordsworth; Blake was a Londoner and a believer in building cities and creating a human, visionary (thus truly human) environment. Blake was a Londoner and a sect of one. A strange, curious, fascinating visionary whose series of prophetic, illuminated works, perhaps with the exception of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and to a lesser extent *Visions of the*

Daughters of Albion, are read and visually appreciated by only a very small number. Blake is a huge cultural presence to this day, and his major works are almost entirely unknown.

Blake's lack of readers is today largely explainable in terms of the sheer difficulty of his major texts. The illuminated prophecies such as *Milton*, *Jerusalem*, *The Book of Urizen*, and the unilluminated *Vala: or*, *The Four Zoas*, are not the kind of texts anyone would nowadays think suitable for undergraduate (or even MA) teaching. They are simply too demanding as texts. But difficulty is not the only issue when it comes to considering the enigma of Blake's influence. In his own time he had fewer readers than he has today. In an age in which historians and critics locate the beginning of the modern literary market-place, including in that the emergence of at least the prospect of a mass reading public, Blake developed a style of writing and design which seems like a deliberate throwback to the medieval world of the pre-Gutenberg hand-printed book. Raymond Williams, discussing the figure of the Romantic artist in his seminal *Culture and Society*, makes the convincing case that the origins of Romantic ambition in poetry and the novel stems from the emergence (the first glimpses) of a mass reading public. It is in the Romantic period that writers can for the first time imagine reaching enough people to begin to influence what was often at the time referred to as "public opinion."[iv] E. P. Thompson makes a similar case in *The Making of the English Working Class*, and more recently William St. Clair has demonstrated that the "romantic period marked the start of a continuing, self-sustaining, expansion, a take-off in the nation's reading equivalent to the take-off in manufacturing production which accelerated at about the same time."[v] Romantic studies has, indeed, become dominated by accounts of the

"massification" (a modern word, admittedly) of reading and publishing in the period.[vi] The phenomenon of mass publishing also, of course, had a profound effect on the visual arts, creating an increasing demand for printed reproductions of art along with new phenomena, like the rise of the political satirist (we would say cartoonist today).[vii] The London Blake lived in for all but a few years of his life boasted an incredibly vibrant artistic culture. Writing to a friend, as he prepared to vacate the house in Felpham, Sussex, in which for three years at the beginning of the 1800s he had laboured on *The Four* Zoas and prossibly *Milton*, Blake wrote: "Every one who hears of my going to London again Applauds it as the only course for the interest of all concerned in My Works. Observing that I ought not to be away from the opportunities London affords of seeing fine Pictures and the various improvements in Works of Art going on in London."[viii] Romantic scholars have recently returned to the social communication of ideas in the public culture of cities such as London.[ix] Such places as the theatre, the coffee-house, the art gallery, the concert hall were still crucial in this period and were in themselves radically mutating. Blake himself was influenced by this urban sociability, exhibiting his own work in 1809 in number 28, Broad Street, Golden Square, and meeting fellow artists and radicals such as Tom Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin at soirees, such as those given by the radical publisher Joseph Johnson.[x] Despite his involvement in London intellectual life – he knew some of the most important artists of his day, such as James Barry, Henry Fuseli and John Flaxman - it remains something of an enigma why Blake, so immensely ambitious with regard to his work, should have so decisively turned his face away from the emergent literary market-place from which writers such as Walter Scott, Byron and Robert Burns gained such unprecedented

audiences. In a letter to Thomas Butt, for example, Blake says of the poem he is writing in Felpham: "I consider it as the Grandest Poem that This World Contains . . . . This poem shall by Divine Assistance be progressively Printed & Ornamented with Prints & given to the Public"[xi]. Only a handful of finished versions of *Milton* were ever printed, only four of them (Copies A, B, C and D) remaining today. *Vala, or The Four Zoas* does not appear to have sold one copy during Blake's lifetime. Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in the last of the poem's Memorable Fancies describes witnessing a conversation between an Angel and a Devil. He writes of the former:

> Note: This Angel, who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend; we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well.
>
> I have also The Bible of Hell, which the world shall have whether they will or no.
>
> One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression.[xii]

It is incredibly stirring to read Blake's prophetic plans to give to the world his "Bible of Hell" (the series of illuminated prophetic books, plus *The Four Zoas*, which is inaugurated here in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). We need to remember, however, that this Angel turned Devil is Thomas Paine, whose small manifesto-like work, *Commonsense*, sold tens of thousands of cheap copies in America in the build-up to the American revolution, as did his *The Rights of Man*, in the early 1790s, in Britain. There are, in the world today, nine copies of Blake's *Marriage*, and as the anonymous editors of

the version from which I have just quoted suggest: "it seems unlikely that any copies of so striking and unusual a work of art could have been destroyed."[xiii] St Clair's comment is stark in its contrast with Paine: "Blake did not become readily available to be read until the mid twentieth century."[xiv]

Why did Blake decide to stroll off in the opposite direction of the dawning age of mass reproduction? The most obvious answer would surely be that he had no choice about the matter.[xv] Blake was aesthetically, religiously, ideologically and temperamentally an individualist. He could not see how the dawning age of mechanical reproduction of the word and the image could contribute to a "cleansing of the doors of perception." In terms of Walter Benjamin's famous essay on that subject, Blake was totally committed to the messianic aura of the unique work of art.[xvi] This is why he turned the art of engraving, an already long-established technique of reproduction, on its head. In the eighteenth-century apprentice engravers were routinely trained in the art of writing and designing backwards. The practice meant a direct root to printing the engraved plate and the omission of the need for some inverting mediating medium. Blake took the engraver's art of turning the visible world on its head to stunningly new extremes, however. The reader of this catalogue does not need a lengthy discussion of Blake's inversion of standard intaglio engraving and printing.[xvii] Suffice to say that while traditional (which means here all other) engravers cut into their medium, Blake brought out his inverted words and designs in a method involving a heat-resistant stopping fluid (applied with a poet's pen rather than an engraver's burin) and the fiery medium of acid. His copper-plates were literally burnt and burnt again in baths of acid in a technique, revolutionary in itself, which Blake directly associated with the Promethean fires of

social revolution and spiritual apocalypse. Before that famous moment from which I have already quoted a phrase, in his inverting masterpiece, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes:

> But the first notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.
>
> If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.
>
> For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' the narrow chinks of his cavern.[xviii]

After each plate was press printed, as Blake's admirers know, he would paint each plate into their full visionary form, thus ensuring that each version of each particular book was unique, singular, an unrepeatable event.[xix] Each illuminated book Blake produced was as unique as he believed each human being on the earth could be. The epigram which completes the "Preface" to *Milton* comes from the Book of Numbers in which Moses rebukes Joshua for trying to silence prophecy: "Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets."

We are as far away from the vision of global liberation contained in that Biblical epigram as the society that Blake lived in, and no doubt we are further away. Yet it is in this fierce, uncompromising assertion of the aura of the individual work and the

singularity of the independent artistic vision, that Blake most speaks to us, to modern or post-modern art, and to the future into which most of us are blindly falling. Blake's rear-garde has, of course, become the avant-garde. His defiant rejection of mechanical reproduction has been transformed by two centuries of artistic innovation and genocidal history into perhaps the primary objective and hope of all serious contemporary art: that is, the attempt to return art and thus human vision to the unique, the singular, the unrepeatable, the event. The astonishing thing about Blake's verbal and visual art, however, is that it retains completely, without any loss over the years, its potential to shock, stagger, revolutionize and widen the reader's/viewer's perception of themselves and the world. To employ, with all due irony registered, the terminology of the multi-million dollar self-help category of the contemporary publishing industry: Blake remains a real *life-changer*.

It is, having said this, insufficient simply to admire Blake from afar, as if a cursory admiration of dislocated, fragmented images and texts amounted to a legitimate exposure (that is today's word) or experience of Blake. Blake created a system, a mythology, and to be a son or a daughter of Blake one must delve deeply into that alternative reality, that visionary universe. Blake is one of the handful of artists in the history of human artistic endeavour for whom that last phrase is not simply figurative, a rather out-worn metaphor. Blake did create a mythological, visionary universe which he believed had more eternal substance than the fallen world of perception we tend to call reality and which he called "the mundane egg." He also challenges our standard, professionalized categories of thought, so that one needs to be something more than

simply a literary critic or an art historian or a practising writer or painter or indeed any singular disciplinary denomination to be in a position to fruitfully engage with his work.

This exhibition, "Blake & Sons," is exciting, but it is also rather brave. In posing the question of Blake's role in contemporary art it focuses our attention on the issue of cultural assimilation, the culture industry as Adorno called it.[xx] When we look at his work, what it says, but in particular its material and ideological production, we seem to confront an absolute rejection of technological reproduction which is simply beyond (one might also say before, epochally pre-dating) our habitual and our intellectual experience. Blake, putting things simply, did not want to contribute to culture or create what we nowadays call cultural work. He was a revolutionary, an apocalypticist (if I can be excused such a neologism), a millenarian, post-Muggletonian visionary, who transcended any idea of a progressive culture, since for him the apocalypse had already happened. It started, as he states on a number of occasions, in the year of his birth. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, writing in his Christological year, he wrote: "As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives." Ackroyd, very early on in his biography, quotes a passage from Swedenborg, Blake's spiritual opponent in the *Marriage*, which confirms (at least for Blake) this dating: "The Last Judgement was accomplished in the Spiritual World in the year 1757 . . . the former heaven and the former earth are passed away, and all things are become New."[xxi] It is this fact about Blake's world-view, that for him the apocalypse had always already occurred, that gives us a genuine clue in our attempt to register the influence (both actual and possible) of Blake on modern art.[xxii]

Blake's rejection of mass reproduction was a choice made in a truly revolutionary moment (socially, politically, artistically, culturally, economically, nationally and trans-nationally). Others were to repeat the move again and again throughout the next hundred years, from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, William Morris's medievalism, Pugin's Gothicism, onto the decadence of the 1890s and the Paterian classicism of that same decade, finally taking us to the avant-gardes of the Surrealists, the Dada-ists and the establishment in those forms of avant-garde Modernism of a ground-map (if not a road-map) for the agendas which still preoccupy (post)modern art. Yet the truth was not for Blake embodied in this move away from the *dominant*: the truth for Blake was that "All deities reside in the human breast," a fact (for him a fact) which meant that "Without Contraries is no progression." Blake was a dialectical thinker writing at the same time as dialectics (in the shape of Hegelian philosophy) was being philosophically born. Born again into our age of total or saturation reproduction, Blake would not need to think again, he would find his insistence on the need to revolutionize the relation between Imagination and its devouring reproduction confirmed, a billion times over. He would still assert that all human creative activity needs to face towards the singular, the unique event of apocalyptic individuality.

It is when we begin to understand the nature of Blake's apocalyptic beliefs (that, for him, the apocalypse need not be a matter of deferral) that we begin to be able to respond to the intensely avant-garde nature of his work. His *Laocoön as Jehovah with Satan and Adam*, for example, would not be out of place within an exhibition of contemporary multi-media or "mixed genre" works.[xxiii] Originally commissioned to engrave the ancient statue in Abraham Ree's *Cyclopedia; or, University Dictionary of*

Arts, Sciences, and Literature (1819), Blake also produced his own visionary engraved version in which the group of three characters are re-figured into Biblical archetypes and surrounded by flashes of text, Greek, Hebrew and English, which look like some kind of apocalyptic graffiti. The text includes interrelated strings and spirals of writing wrapping themselves around the hands, arms and torsos of the three figures, reading from left to right horizontally and from top to bottom vertically, and spilling in between other lines of writing in Capitals and lower cases. One of the texts reads: "Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists Their Works were destroyed by the Seven Angels of the Seven Churches in Asia." Another reads: "The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination/It Manifests itself in his Works of Art [In Eternity All is Vision]." Siegal reads this astonishing engraving as part of a reaction, in Blake and others, against the stifling influence of the neo-classical rules of art, a reaction that shifts art's emphasis from the classical work (and thus the priority of imitation) to the artist him- or herself. This shift, which we call Romanticism, destabilizes the categories of history and visual representation and allows Blake to challenge received tradition, even that of Biblical inheritance, in ways which are still avant-garde, para-doxical (using the word doxa here in the sense of that which is the dominant idea, ideology). Blake's masterwork, *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, to take another example, bears the same avant-garde re-evaluation of values, if we know how to look at it and read it. Commissioned by John Linnel in 1821, when Blake was 65 years old, what can look like a hopelessly "old style" (pre-modern) Biblical illustration, in fact treats its Biblical source text as in no sense more original or primary than Blake's own visionary re-presentation.[xxiv] Blake presents his *Book of Job as if* for the first time, transforming his own, by then perfected engraver's

art, into a direct, singular and independent vision. As Blake selectively engraves passages from the Biblical text he knowingly, near the end of his life, makes them his own, so that it begins to seem, astonishing as it sounds, that the Bible (at least in these passages) was written in imitation of William Blake. Kathleen Raine in her brief but useful discussion of the work states: "The series begins and ends with a symbolic expression of Blake's belief that Christianity is 'the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination, Imagination the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint Shadow . . . . Let every Christian, as much as in him lies, engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some Mental pursuit for the Building of Jerusalem."[xxv]

Reproduction, massification, is not a problem for Blake, despite his resistance to it. For Blake, in fact, a certain kind of visionary, apocalyptic massification was the goal: "Would to God that all the Lord's people were Prophets." The great questions for contemporary art are the same questions which Blake so uniquely confronted: how to negotiate the dialectic between the unique work of art and its copy, vision and the reproduction of that vision, art as an authentic social practice and its assimilation into pure merchandise and normative, reified "culture." Blake, as we know from his "Descriptive Catalogue," demanded "One third of the price . . . at the time of Purchase and remainder on Delivery."[xxvi] We could drive ourselves mad trying to estimate the human (Imaginative) ratio (Blake's word) between the unique experience of viewing the work and the un-unique experience of possessing it. A painting is a copy of itself once the sale has been agreed and it has been taken home to hang. And yet, as we know, museums are often the deadening archival chambers of art and singular vision. Art,

verbal, visual, aural, spectral, exists only in the singular, unique moment of what Blake called vision and which I would call the event. Blake is so important an idea to our contemporary age because he seems to have managed to live a life of art, not in snatches, not in moments of intense being or epiphanies, but day to day, night by night, until the very last day of his life. His whole life was an event. Blake is an important idea to us because he has become *the* figure for a total artistic life. To quote the famous letter he wrote to Dr. Trusler on the 23rd August, 1799:

> I feel that a Man may be happy in This World. And I know that This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity & by these I shall not regulate my proportions, & Some Scarce see Nature at all But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its powers You certainly Mistake when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination . . . .[xxvii]

"One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination": that was Blake's life and work, and that's why he still speaks to us as an idea of art. And that is a great fact, a great influence,

so long as we do not immediately assimilate it, archivize it, reify it. There is a tendency amongst some "Blake-lovers" to turn him into a Patron Saint of the Imagination and to respond to his work with hagiography rather than with critical intelligence. But Blake was not presenting a "system" to be adopted ("One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression"), his work celebrates a human faculty, indeed it celebrates all the human faculties. Modern art still needs Blake, if it is to remember the window it is attempting to make (maybe force, or puncture, or smash, or segue) into the mundane egg of what we are told is the real. I find it less than coincidental that the great post-war theorist of the very idea of influence, Harold Bloom, began his career writing about Blake.[xxviii] For Bloom, as for Blake, influence is authentic not when it promotes imitation and emulation; it is authentic when it provokes a move to independent artistic and spiritual action.

I cannot help but remember, by way of conclusion, the story behind Blake's life-mask, copies of which are still sold (when stocks have not been exhausted) in Tate Britain. Blake looks very severe in this replica, this simulacrum of his face. It was made, as an experiment, by an "amateur phrenologist," Mr Deville, in the last decade of Blake's life. Ackroyd describes the scene: "His head was covered with wet plaster which then hardened, while two straws were stuck into his nostrils so he could breathe; since the hardening plaster became uncomfortably hot, it is really no surprise that Blake's mouth is turned down in an expression of apparent pain."[xxix] Having had, for medical reason, a similar experience, I can attest to the discomfort that the blind, increasing heat of this process produces. But what is important (what is wrong, or mis-figured) about Blake's life-mask are his vacant, eyeless eyes. Blake wrote all his life about the Human Face Divine, by which he meant that God was, or at least can be, made in our own image: "All

deities reside in the human breast." Blake's liberated Albion, his New Jerusalem, his Golgonooza, is a city made by humans in the image of humans; rather than a city made by humans which only alienates the human eye, the human heart and desire. Blake's city, the city of his Imagination, returned his human gaze, his human vision. Golgonooza, to quote S. Foster Damon, the great Blake scholar, "is Los's city of 'Art & Manufacture' [*Milton* 24:50]. It contains, or consists of, the physical bodies of man and woman. The city is foursquare, like the New Jerusalem."[xxx] This city is so humanized that for Blake it is identical to the human body. You can't see it represented in art; *you can only see it*. Blake and sons. Blake and daughters. Blake and the Human Face Divine, another name for which is Science, Technology, Commerce, Architecture, Medicine, Law, History, Religion and Art: "the Camp, the Court, & the University," the screen, the gallery, the street, is where it might, once again, appear.

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[i] . Peter Ackroyd, *Blake*, London: Vintage, 1999. Ackroyd also calls Blake: "the last great religious poet in England." (p.4)

[ii] . When *Milton* was actually completed appears to still be a matter of contention. The frontispiece of the poem displays the date 1804, however, the water-mark dating of the paper on which the poem was printed give a date of publication no earlier than 1808: see "Textual Note" in *Milton*, eds. Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Eason, New York: Random House, 1978, p.59. The other "unofficial national anthem" is, of course, "Land of Hope and Glory."

[iii] . *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, Commentary Harold Bloom, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, Revised Edition, 1982, p.95.

[iv] . Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, Harmondsworth: Pelican,

[v] . E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1968; William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.13.

[vi] . Readers interested in this field should consult the research web-site attached to The Corvey Project at the universities of Cardiff and Sheffield Hallam: <www.shu.ac.uk/schools/cs/corvey>

[vii] . See, for example, Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996 and Richard Godfrey, ed. *James Gilray: the Art of Caricature*, London: Tate Publishing, 2001.

[viii] . Erdman, p.728.

[ix] . See *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*, eds. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

[x] . Ackroyd remains less convinced than others that Blake attended Johnson's soirees on anything like a regular basis (p.86). Despite this, the interaction, on an intellectual level, between Blake and these figures remains indisputable. It should also be noted that number 28 Golden Square was Blake's brother's hosiery shop.

[xi]. Erdman, 730.

[xii] . William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, introduction and commentary by Geoffrey Keynes, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975, p.xxvii. This edition reprints the copy of the poem contained in Cambridge's permanent collection of Blake's works in the Fitzwilliam Museum. See also Erdman, p.44.

[xiii]. *Marriage*, p.xii.

[xiv]. St. Clair, p.581.

[xv] . The common idea that Blake was an autodidact is sometimes referred to in the face of such a question. It requires stating, then, that Blake was given a rigorous education in the fine arts at Henry Pars' Drawing School on the Strand and then, at the age of fourteen, as an apprentice to the London engraver James Basire, a man who was attached to the Society of Antiquities and the Royal Academy Schools, where Blake in 1779 was accepted as a student. The President of the Royal Academy Schools was Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose lectures Blake attended, and one only has to read Ackroyd's description of the entrance of the Academy Schools' new premises in New Somerset House, to understand how steeped in classical art Blake was by the beginning of his adulthood. (Ackroyd, pp.58-9)

[xvi] . Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schoken Books, 1969, pp.217-51.

[xvii] . A good account, with the much needed supplement of photographic examples, comes in the catalogue for the largest ever Blake exhibition at Tate Britain, 9th November 2000 — 11th February 2001 and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 27th March — 24th June 2001: *William Blake*, eds. Robin Hamlyn and Michael Phillips, London: Tate Publishing, 2000, p.98-171. That Blake was not alone in his use of a firey method of engraving also needs stating here and it is extremely interesting to compare his technique with that employed by James Barry; see Michael Phillips, "James Barry: Artist-Printmaker" in *James Barry, 1741-1806: "The Great Historical Painter,"* ed. Tom Dunne, Crawford Art Gallery: Gandon Editions Kinsale, pp.141-7.

[xviii] *Marriage*, p.xxii.

[xix]. In the later illuminated texts and engraved paintings Blake would apply colour to the plate itself before printing (see Ackroyd, p.190; 193-4).

[xx] . See Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

[xxi]. Ackroyd, p.5.

[xxii] . Readers wanting to know more about the backgrounds of Blake's religious heritage should consult E. P. Thompson's *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 1993.

[xxiii] . There is an excellent discussion of the piece in Jonah Siegel's *The Nineteenth-Century Culture of Art*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp.80-9. For good quality reproductions of the engraving see *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books*, intro. David Blindman, The William Blake Trust, London: Thames and Hudson, 2001, p.403; see also Hamlyn and Phillips, p.37.

[xxiv]. Blake had completed a water-colour series of illustrations on the Book of Job in 1818 and had drawn an image of a weeping Job as early as ca. 1785. All Blake's Job illustrations connected to his work for Linnell were published in *Illustrations of the Book of Job by William Blake: Being All the Water-Colour Designs/Pencil Drawings and Engravings/ Reproduced in Facsimile*, New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1935; a more recent reproduction of this set of images can be found in *Blake's Illustrations for The Book of Job*, New York: Dover Pubs., 1995.

[xxv] . Kathleen Raine, *William Blake*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1970, pp.186-88.

[xxvi] . Erdman, p.529. The rest of this "Conditions of Sale" notice are also worth citing here: "II. The Pictures and Drawings to remain in the Exhibition till its close, which will be the 29th of September 1809; and the Picture of the Canterbury Pilgrims, which is to be engraved, will be Sold only on condition of its remaining in the Artist's hands twelve months, when it will be delivered to the Buyer." (p.529) Did Blake need to spend a year with his own astonishingly vivid and multi-populated painting to ensure that its exact copy remained in his mind's eye? Would it have been easier for him to let it go (one of his greatest "classical"

achievements in the tradition of the "strong line") if he had been able to possess an exact, photographic copy?

[xxvii]. Erdman, p.702.

[xxviii] . See, for example, Bloom's *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (1961), Rev. Ed., Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971; *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1963; *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. It could be argued that Bloom's development into the theorist of the anxiety of influence was significantly fuelled by his engagement with a poet, Blake, who often seems to be completely free from all anxieties of influence.

[xxix]. Ackroyd, p.372.

[xxx] . S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1971, p.62.