

WILLIAM BLAKE'S *ENOCH* LITHOGRAPH: SELF-ANNIHILATION &/AS
ARTISTIC AND ECOLOGICAL INSPIRATION

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: William Blake's *Enoch* Lithograph: Self-annihilation &/as Artistic and Ecological Inspiration

The British Romantic artist/poet William Blake's lithograph *Enoch* (1806/7) illustrates the enigmatic Genesis 5:24 fragment "Enoch walked with God; then was no more, because God took him away." The passage marks a moment of individual transformation where a biblical character is annihilated, which Blake utilizes to think through his idea of self-annihilation. The theme emerges in the lithograph in a way that connects with and informs Blake's culminating illuminated epics the 1811 *Milton: A Poem in 2 Books* and the 1820 *Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion*. In the former the central poetic persona asserts: "I come in self-annihilation and the grandeur of inspiration." The thesis expands views that emphasize thematic interactions between visual art and poetry within discrete illuminated books. I show that Blake cultivates major themes across seemingly minor works of art and the better-known illuminated books in relation to his art historical context.

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CHAPTER I

PRELUDIUM

The most sublime act is to set another before you. - William Blake, "Proverbs of Hell" in
THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL (1790)

Awaking it to Life among the Flowers of Beulah rejoicing in Unity
In the Four Senses in the Outline the Circumference & Form. for ever
In Forgiveness of Sins which is *Self Annihilation*. it is the Covenant of Jehovah

The Four Living Creatures Chariots of Humanity Divine Incomprehensible
In beautiful Paradises Expand These are the Four Rivers of Paradise"
- William Blake, *Jerusalem The Emanation Of The Giant Albion*, pl. 98 (1821)

Introduction

In 1806-07, the English Romantic visual artist and poet William Blake (1757-1827) produces his only known lithograph, the *Enoch* (Plate 1). As such, it occupies an exceptional position in an artist's corpus sated with extraordinary images. The artwork is inimitable not only because it represents Blake's sole foray into lithography, but also for the fact that only five extant impressions of the visually intense *Enoch* remain, created in a medium fabricated for its efficiency in mass-producing prints. Most importantly, the *Enoch* lithograph is key to the development of the central Blakean thematic of self-annihilation in historical relation to both the Napoleonic wars and ecological issues tied to the Industrial Revolution. It is my contention that the *Enoch* lithograph itself generates the central Blakean thematic of self-annihilation. Yet, while self-annihilation comprises the primary theme Blake returns to in his illuminated books and separate works from

1810 until his death, the theme likewise informs a range of artistic and literary production within the period. As a result, the image connects to a veritable network of artistic ideas in the visual and literary cultural fields of the period.

Yet, despite its peculiar position—both in Blake’s oeuvre and in the history of art—it is equally astonishing the lithograph has not drawn a greater amount of critical attention. Indeed, the criticism the lithograph has generated addresses the *Enoch* in one of two ways. Some scholars treat the *Enoch* in passing. In these cases, the lithograph’s value rests in its relation to early English experiments with lithography.¹ Others treat the *Enoch* with respect to wide-ranging trends in Blake’s literary and visual art.² In these cases, the lithograph is important as extrinsic evidence for corroborating far-reaching assertions about the artist/poet. None of these studies, however, venture with sufficient vigor to affirm the work of art’s intrinsic importance.

My thesis intervenes in this regard. Above all, I wish to give greater interpretive specificity to the *Enoch* lithograph. I interpret Blake’s *Enoch* first and foremost as a complex artwork itself deserving of extended interpretation. Only then do I wish to balance its meaning with the thematic trajectory of Blake’s illuminated books and poetry. Accordingly, I want to propose that the *Enoch* might best be understood as a transitional artwork within the arc of Blake’s career. Specifically, the *Enoch* represents the visual art object through which the Blakean idea of self-annihilation first gains artistic traction.

¹ See Robert N. Essick, “Blake’s ‘Enoch Lithograph’” in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 14 (1981): 180-183 and Raymond Lister, *Infernal Methods: A Study of William Blake’s Art Techniques* (London, United Kingdom: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1975), 28.

² See Shiela Spector, “Blake’s Graphic Use of Hebrew” in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* (2003) and Michael Phillips, *William Blake, 1757-1827: Le Génie Visionnaire du Romantisme Anglais* (Paris, France: Paris Musées, 2009).

Indeed, the central theme of “self-annihilation”—defined as a re-cognition of the essential interconnectivity between one’s self and others (interpersonal and environmental)—crystallizes in large degree through Blake’s lithographic experiment.

Formalist, iconological, and materialist modes of analysis provide evidence this. With respect to formal issues, I begin by drawing out the lithograph’s connection to theoretical issues from the history of lithography. I argue, while in relation to Blake, that lithography itself moves to “annihilate,” or destabilize, the artist’s privileged position as a factor of artistic production. From there, I then move to examine the significance of *Enoch* and stylistic matters. Initially, I grapple with the Gothic elements the lithograph exhibits. In this regard, I show the lithograph’s contestatory relation to issues of nationalism involved in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medievalism. From there, I connect the lithograph to similar issues as they come to the fore of Blake’s *Jerusalem*. Then, I explore the implications of the lithograph’s mirrored Hebrew. In the *Enoch*, the visual play of Hebrew verbal inscription moves to break down the discrete identities of artist and viewer. Thereafter, I locate a link between the lithograph and *Milton*. Indeed, it is in *Milton* that Blake’s mirrored writing first shows up in English. In addition, it is the first of Blake’s works where self-annihilation becomes the work’s key operative thematic.

With respect to iconological concerns, I contend primarily with issues connecting the *Genesis* passage the *Enoch* illustrates to *Milton*. One critical absence in scholarship on the lithograph is that no one has established its connection to Blake’s reception of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. To rectify this, one aspect of my project is to establish the lithograph’s relation to Milton’s national epic. Indeed, one stimulating but often

neglected passage in *Paradise Lost* alludes to the Enoch text in the Hebrew Bible. Milton's text, as Blake picks up on, raises the figure as an example of pacifistic resistance to an age typified by violence. In doing so, the *Enoch* acts a type of artistic prism, absorbing artistic principles and concerns related to self-annihilation from Blake's early and intermediate works, pivots upon Blake's reception of John Milton's work, and shapes them in a way that connects to, and informs, Blake's more developed work, with *Milton* serving as a key example.

Last, I, and admittedly in a speculative manner, I aim to show how ecological issues might be drawn out from the materiality of Blake's lithographic experiment. Dealing with the artwork's material support becomes a way to create a more nuanced framework for the interpretation of visual art. In the end, this manifests itself in the thesis as a flight into theory—and will perhaps be more helpful for thinking about the work of other artists and works, than specifically for interpreting the lithograph itself.

The lithograph illustrates Genesis 5:24, an obscure passage in the Hebrew Bible that features the faithful Enoch, Great-Grandfather of Noah. As Alexander Geddes's 1792 translation of the text reads (likely the translation Blake used when producing the lithograph): "So all the days of Henoch were three hundred sixty-five years: *when having lived a godly life, he disappeared; for God took him away.*"³ Notable for its fragmentary quality and ambiguity, the Enoch biblical text demarcates a process of individual transformation. Enoch, because of his relationship with the divine, crosses the threshold between the material world and the heavenly realm. God takes him away, with the result

³ *The holy Bible, or the books accounted sacred by Jews and Christians; Otherwise Called the Books of the Old and New Covenants: faithfully translated from corrected texts of the originals. With Various Readings, Explanatory notes, and Critical Remarks. By the Rev. Alexander Geddes, vol. 1* (London, United Kingdom: J. Davis and Sold by R. Faulder, New Bond-Street; and J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church-yard, 1792), 11-12. My emphasis

that his material selfhood is—in a sense—annihilated. By Enoch’s living “a godly” faithful life, he becomes infused—and thereby unifies—with the divine and disappears.

Pictured through Blake’s lithographic illustration, Enoch’s movement between earth and heaven ruptures di(vided)visions between God and man, where humanity is seen as inherently divided from the divine. Enoch’s individual selfhood gives way to “walking,” or connecting, with the divine. The distinction between human and divine is destabilized, with the result that Enoch becomes a paradigmatic example of a self-annihilated figure, having connected with a divine Other outside of himself and now occupies a position in Eternity, Blake’s conception of the heavenly realm.

The Flow of Self-annihilation as Blakean Thematic

It will be useful to briefly trace the development of the theme of self-annihilation as it pertains to Blake’s work before and after the lithograph. As early as Blake’s 1789 *THE BOOK of THEL*, the artist/poet exhibits an interest in exploring the artistic and ecological possibilities of a move beyond individual consciousness. As the Blake scholar turned visual theorist W.J.T. Mitchell notes, the *THEL* illuminated book shows a concern with how “[t]he attributes of an alienated, individualizing self-consciousness, are inevitably cut off from the spontaneous acceptance of life as unified process.”⁴ In the illuminated book’s climax, a personified Cloud responds to the poem’s protagonist Thel’s anxiety of “be[ing] at death the food of worms” (*Thel* 3:23; E 5).⁵ Interpreting the inevitability of death in markedly optimistic and ecologically charged terms, the Cloud

⁴ *Blake’s Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 91.

⁵ References to Blake’s poetry come from *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1988) and are referenced in text by work, plate, and line(s), followed by the page in Erdman (“E”) where the passage can be found.

replies that “if thou art the food of worms. O Virgin of the skies, / How great thy use. how great thy blessing; every thing that lives, / lives not alone, nor for itself” (*TheL* 4:25-27; E 5). Blake’s poetic image of a natural process imagines that in death one becomes a means of subsistence for other beings. Hence, what emerges here is what might be seen as a nascent form of a self-annihilative ethos; an ultimate loss of self connects to the generation of new life.

The self-annihilative drive towards recognizing the essential interconnectivity existent between all sentient things similarly emerges in the 1793 *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*. The illuminated book features a proverb which expresses that “The most sublime act is to set another before you” (MHH 7:18; E 36). Read in ethical terms, a commitment to others comes to operate as a psychological vehicle for short-circuiting the illusion of a solitary self. It is an ethical commitment on behalf of another that raises one to lofty, even divine, heights.⁶ Acting from a mental space where one consistently looks beyond one’s own self and one’s own needs becomes key to reshaping, and thereby expanding, one’s awareness.

Indeed, from there, such an interest can be traced across the entire arc of Blake’s multimedia corpus. Yet, for the purpose of this thesis—and its focus on issues of style, meaning, and ecological issues—the self-annihilative thematic most central to my concerns impressively occurs near the end of Blake’s final vexing 100 plate illuminated epic, *Jerusalem*. The poet, in the verbal field of the ninety-eighth plate, speaks of an

⁶ See "Sublime, adj. and n.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192766?rskey=tjGIiR&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed December 03, 2011).

inspired awakening to life within an ecologically engaged verdant setting where “Self annihilation” acts as the centrally located visual core of the textual passage:

Awaking it to Life among the Flowers of Beulah rejoicing in Unity
In the Four Senses in the Outline the Circumference & Form. for ever
In Forgiveness of Sins which is Self Annihilation” (*J* 98:20-25; *E* 257)

The text places the viewer/reader at a moment of consciousness when everything becomes illuminated in an ecologically charged setting. Individual selfhood gives way to a greater sense of connection to an environmental whole much larger than oneself. The text resonates also with Blake’s broader theory of art. The “Four Senses” of the passage correspond to Blake’s four-fold theory of human cognition (Imagination, Sensation, Emotion, and Reason), which here exist in integral relation to “the Outline the Circumference & Form” germane to Blake’s largely neoclassical style, with its emphasis on line. In a moment of apocalyptic realization, the poet equivocates between the “Forgiveness of Sins” and “Self Annihilation.” To forgive another necessitates a move towards a form of ethical thought whereby one thinks from the position of the other, as opposed to one in which one is preoccupied with oneself, thereby engendering a unity between Self and Other—the central core vector, or principle, that in different ways operates across the trajectory of Blake’s visionary canon.

Conceptual Concerns

Yet, the range of Blake’s thematic interest in self-annihilation generates a problematic for Blake studies for which this thesis purposes to offer a somewhat abbreviated response, focused on a single visual example of Blake’s art. How does Blake work out the idea of self-annihilation, not only within poetic texts—to which the critical gaze becomes largely directed in the field—but through his visual art positioned in an art

historical context, as well? That is, how does the theme emerge not just in the *intertextual* interplay of poetic texts, but also through the *intervisual* interplay of visual images.

Phrased differently, this thesis—the first extended critical effort to make sense of Blake’s lithograph—engages the problem of how Blake’s idea of self-annihilation develops, while implicitly challenging studies of Blake’s work that hermeneutically privilege his poetry, thereby largely placing under critical erasure Blake’s institutional position as a printmaker trained on the margins of the history of art, when placed beside genres like history painting.

However, the core issues with which the thesis is concerned retain broader forms of resonance within the disciplines of Art History and interdisciplinary humanities, generally. In grappling with a richly multimedia artist whose work necessitates a movement to interdisciplinary engagement, I have sought to craft a mode for the interpretation of the artist’s work in integral relation to the artist’s mode of production and artistic context. Because Blake was trained primarily as a visual artist in the capacity of a reproductive engraver in James Basire’s workshop, I have sought to interpret the development of the literary theme of “self-annihilation,” located in Blake’s poetry, in a way that gives primacy to a lesser-known work of Blake’s visual art in its development. As such, I would hope that this thesis might interest scholars working in fields beyond Blake studies, and especially those interested in artists and literary writers whose experiments on the interstices of different forms of artistic practice invite new disciplinary perspectives to emerge through engaged acts of interpretation.

Blake's *Enoch* Lithograph

Blake's sole foray into lithography is something of a paradox. On the one hand, it can be seen as something of a curious art object. Blake produces the lithograph not long after the technique's 1796 invention on the continent and subsequent introduction into England. At its most basic level, Blake's *Enoch* is as an extremely early example of the lithographic technique in the history of printmaking, as the rough execution of the lithograph makes clear. On the other hand, however, the lithograph accords well with both Blake's established pictorial style and broader types of thematic resonance Blake pursues elsewhere in his illuminated canon. While more detailed remarks will follow, first in terms of the *Enoch*'s formal stylistic aspects (Chapter Two of the thesis) and relative to the *Enoch*'s primary self-annihilative and associated ecological thematic principles (Chapters Three and Four, respectively), it will be useful to stage the more significant features of the lithograph here.

While Blake's *Enoch* lithograph (Plate 1), does not immediately strike the viewer as a particularly imposing artwork, in the sense either of size or innovative artistic technique, Blake nevertheless manages to compress an intricate and meaningful arrangement of figures into a relatively small amount of pictorial space. With respect to scale, Enoch, as the central persona of the artwork, appears largest. Figures engaged with scroll texts, some communicating with one another, surround him, and appear second only to Enoch in size. Allegorical figures surrounding Enoch and representing three of the arts appear smallest.

On the surface, Blake's *Enoch* evidences both monumental and decorative elements. A plinth featuring ogival Gothic arches serves as a central architectural motif

that supports the placement of the figures. Grapevines demarcate the lithograph's boundaries, left and right, bringing a distinctly medieval iconography into play within Blake's lithograph, referencing the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages that exert an immense influence on the artist/poet.

In terms of setting, the lithograph places the transfigured person of Enoch in the center of a divinely illuminated realm. The Hebrew text in the book Enoch wielded identifies the figure as "אֶנוֹךְ/Enoch." Blake's lithograph shows the Hebrew Bible figure having moved away from the mundane world, and occupying a spiritual space, which the lithograph's ethereal background makes evident. A horizontally growing field of vegetation underpins the bottom of the picture-plane, supernaturally supporting the plinth Enoch sits upon. The vines that border the picture appear to grow up the sides of the image and generate a likewise otherworldly tension between layers of two and three-dimensionality in the picture, while directing the viewer's eye upwards.

Blake's lithograph integrates the tension between light and dark that typifies Gothic form. In the period, the Romantic period-eye typically construes the Gothic as a mysteriously dark medieval style. It is an art where symbolization and representation both become equal parts "irrational, super-rational, transcendental" and where "the inner world and the outer world are still unreconciled and the unreconciled opposites strive for redemption in transcendental spheres, in intensified psychical conditions," exacting "an artful refined chaos."⁷ The Gothic disrupts expectations for simplicity and closure in terms of generating meaning through an engagement with art and architecture. Rather,

⁷ Wilhelm Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, trans. Herbert Read (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1964), 114; 80-81; 82.

Gothic manifests itself as a style that turns upon sustaining a dynamic perceptual tension between the spiritual and material.

Blake remediates Gothic form through the lithograph in two ways towards a mystical end. First, Blake transposes the physical architecture of the Gothic into print image form. He builds Gothic arches into the pediment Enoch is placed upon. This endows Enoch's position with a sense of massivity and spiritual importance. Second, Blake draws the luminosity that typifies cathedrals of the High Gothic style into the lithograph. Light filters from the negative space above Enoch's head, downwards. Blake evokes the Gothic because its architectural connotation of housing a more enlightened mode of existence hinging upon a sense of unity with the divine.

Iconographically, the allegorical figures personifying the arts prove central. A litany of representations of artistic media surround Enoch. To the right, a figure writes, representing poetry, to the left, a man paints, personifying the visual arts, and a woman further left stuns a harp, standing for music. In addition, floating figures interacting with texts and each other appear to the left and right of the image's mid-point. Blake's *Enoch* explores the relationship between the arts. The image also displays a striking graphic deployment of literary Hebrew that immediately catches the viewer's eye.⁸ In this regard, Blake's *Enoch*—like the better-known works of Blake's illuminated corpus—lays bare an artistic concern with the word/image problematic. Blake artistically engages with the area where multiple instances of visual and verbal forms of representation converge.

Accordingly, Blake's art shows how the two can provide mutually inspiring illumination

⁸ To transcribe, the figures on the right read from Blake's inclusion of the second half of Genesis 5:28: ("אתד אלהימ / ונונו כילקת"). As we shall see, Blake becomes able to engage in a significant play with the act of inscription when deploying the Hebrew. See pages 59-61 below.

in terms of viewerly interaction. One aspect involved has to do with the viewer's interaction with the graphic/visual role of the verbal Hebrew. It plays a part in communicating the artwork's meaning.

Pragmatic Considerations

To conclude prelude, some sense of the thesis's organization. In Section Two, I attend to the formal matters of style involved in Blake's lithograph, arguing that style and the materiality of Blake's engagement with lithography represent meaningful functions of the lithograph. In doing so, I first historicize the *Enoch* within the history of printmaking/lithography. Second, in engaging with the materiality of lithographic artistic practice, I argue that Blake takes advantage of the lithographic technique with relation to his graphic use of Hebrew in a way that intersects his later graphic play with mirrored or reversed language in *Milton*. Itself connected to Blake's idea of self-annihilation, I contend that Blake's use of mirrored writing assumes a meaningful function for the first time in the *Enoch*, in contextual relation to the presence of reversed Ancient Greek text in the Swiss/English visual artist Henry Fuseli's lithographic experiments

In Section Three, I seek to chart out directly the lithograph's relation to Blake's idea of self-annihilation, directly. Interpreting the lithograph relative to broader areas of the artist/poet's work, I show that the advanced iteration of Blake's idea about self-annihilation emerges directly through the lithograph. As such, I move to prove that the lithograph is of greater importance to Blake's corpus than previously thought. It connects to Blake's broader interpersonal and pacifistic ethos that comes about largely in response to the Napoleonic wars.

Breaking with such historicist concerns, Section Four interest Blake's lithograph in terms of its ecological implications—and moves to use Blake's lithograph to address theoretical issues. In doing so, I seek to deal with environmentally minded concerns. I deploy ideas from the ecocritical theorist Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought: Rethinking Enviornmental Aesthetics* and poststructuralist philspsher/psychoanalyst Felix Guattari's *Three Ecologies*. Consequently, I play with the possibility of more thoroughly theorizing uses of ecocritical modes of analysis in Art History than has previously been done. As such, Section Four charts out future directions for Art History. It appropriates and pushes the boundaries of literary ecocriticism. As a result, I hope that more ecologically minded modes of critical engagement may be absorbed into the discipline of Art History.

Finally, as a help to the reader, I have situated most images in the body of the thesis for ease of reference. These are cited by chapter and figure number. I place images frequently referred to at the end of the thesis, which are referenced by plate number. Texts I refer to often are cited first as a footnote and then referenced parenthetically in the text, abbreviated as specified.

CHAPTER II

FORMAL MATTERS: STYLE AND MATERIALITY AS MEANINGFUL

“That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art” – William Blake, “A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures, Poetical and Historical Inventions” (1809)

Blake, the History of Printmaking, & the Invention of Lithography

At this juncture, it will be useful to speak to formalistic concerns with respect to Blake’s experiment with lithography. To begin, I will briefly address lithography both within the history of printmaking and in relation to Blake’s theory of art. Then, I will define the factors of artistic production at play on a formal/stylistic level in Blake’s *Enoch* with respect to the Gothic, the English draughtsman John Flaxman’s Neoclassicism, and the Swiss/English painter Henry Fuseli’s Romanticism. Last, I will briefly explore how the materiality of Blake’s experiment in lithography in relation to mirrored writing builds a mechanism of meaning into the materiality of Blake’s medium integrally related to the emergence of self-annihilation in Blake’s *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

Printmaking represents, in general, and perhaps over all other art forms, the most democratizing of artistic media. The mode of production involved in printmaking renders prints, in theory, the most accessible type of fine art object. A print is—after all—defined as “‘a pictorial image’ which has been produced by a process which enables it to be

multiplied.”¹ The art of printmaking (at least from the time of its invention until the contemporary digital revolution in art) closely relates to its correspondence to mass artistic production. The “high-art” of painting, for instance, necessarily leads to a fetishization of the painted image by virtue of its uniqueness. Printmaking, conversely, makes possible the efficient creation of multiple copies of an artwork. As a corollary, the overarching forces of art supply and demand make the work of art less expensive. Hence, the print artwork can be made more widely available to a larger segment of the general populace. As a result, printmaking can be seen as the democratizing artistic medium *par excellence*, before and during Blake’s time.

For lithography, this holds especially true. As the Bavarian inventor of the technique in 1796 Alois Senefelder recalls in his “History of Stone-Printing: From 1796-1800,” the new artistic procedure was created to expedite the process of creating printed works. He opposes his artistic procedure to the more laborious and expensive method of metal etching. A mere pen inked image essentially potentializes the transfer of images towards an unlimited number of print reproductions.² Such a technique expands the potential audience for an artwork, enabling prints to be produced at less cost and, therefore, accessed more inexpensively by more people. Moreover, the simplicity of the process would theoretically democratize the possibilities of artistic expression. Individuals lacking the patience or dexterity to learn to paint, engrave, sculpt—or otherwise take up the painstaking labor involved in becoming an artist trained in more

¹ Antony Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking: An Introduction the History and Techniques* (London, United Kingdom: University of California Press/British Museum Press, 1996), 9.

² See *The Invention of Lithography*, trans. J.W. Muller (New York, NY: Fuchs & Lang, 1911), 3.

traditional artistic media—might find a new mode of creative expression that could be disseminated efficiently and economically.

In addition, I would argue that it is for this reason that Blake only experiments with lithography to produce one artwork—the *Enoch*—and only five impressions of the print. It democratically leaves open the process to later, more able, artists. Blake’s rough execution in the medium, in contradistinction to the stronger works he creates in the illuminated printing and in watercolor, produces an image that thematizes artistic creativity, more generally—as the allegorical interplay of multiple modes of artistic production signifies. The absence of Blakean artworks in the lithographic medium generates a negative space such that new and more able artists might generate their visions through lithography.³

Similarly, lithography occupies a sort of democratizing position within the tradition of critical theory. As the Marxist German literary critic/philosopher/essayist Walter Benjamin writes:

Lithography marked a fundamentally new stage in the technology of reproduction. This much more direct process—distinguished by the fact that the drawing is traced on a stone, rather than incised on a block of wood or etched on a copper plate—first made it possible for graphic art to market its products not only in large numbers, as previously, but in daily changing variations. Lithography enabled graphic art to provide an illustrated accompaniment to everyday life.”⁴

While Benjamin primarily has in mind nineteenth-century French examples of lithography, and in particular Honoré Daumier’s lithographic critique of Louis Philippe’s

³ As Robert N. Essick has argued, Blake also might have just had access to a lithographic printing stone for a very limited amount of time. See Robert N. Essick, “Blake’s ‘Enoch Lithograph’” in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 14 (1981).

⁴ “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 436.

July Monarchy, and its oppressive militaristic presence in French working class neighborhoods,⁵ his theoretical move here nevertheless illuminates the practice of lithography, generally, and Blake's foray into the medium, specifically. For Benjamin, the informal act of drawing manifests the immediacy of the artist's creative act, as opposed to more demanding artistic processes culled from the history of printmaking, with Benjamin using woodcut and metal etching as evidence in support of his argument.

In this regard, lithographic expression intersects Benjamin's Marxist ideals in at least two ways. First, lithography is an art form that can be made available to the masses. It expands the scope of art beyond a bourgeoisie audience to the social sphere of the proletariat—the cultural space from which social transformation might be most effectively enacted. Second, lithography potentializes new forms of artistic intervention into the practice of everyday life. It provides a new means of political intercession. Lithography simplifies artistic technique to the act of drawing. As a result, more people might take up lithography, become artists because of the medium's simplicity, and “aestheticize the political” in a positive way—to follow Benjamin—and engage politics through art.

Blake's very theory of art and printmaking gestures towards the invention of lithography, proper, and Benjamin's theorization of the medium, specifically. Such a democratization of artistic production Benjamin envisions intersects Blake's broader art theory. As Blake writes in his 1793 prose work [*Prospectus*] *TO THE PUBLIC* several

⁵ See especially Daumier's 1834 lithograph, *Rue Transnonain, 15 Avril 1834*. Yet, historicizing Blake as an artist/poet, Benjamin as a critical theorist, and Daumier as a visual artist makes renders this convergence compelling. There are synchronic connections to be made: Blake's art directs a critical eye towards the violent militarism and corresponding constriction of intellectual freedom of his own time in a way that connects synchronically both to Daumier's critique of the proto-Fascist war Louis Philippe's soldiers literally wage on the French populace in 1830s Paris and to the way Benjamin's work pushes back against the fascist militarism of Nazi ideology.

years before Senefelder's invention of lithography, but in a manner that resonates with the medium's function and Benjamin's ideas:

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 owing to a neglect of means to propogate 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; who has invented a method of Printing both Letter-press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand than any before discovered, while it produces works at less than one fourth the expense (E 692).

Here, while Blake is engaged in a discussion of his invention of the illuminated printing method, more generally, the text's aims resonate with Benjamin and his ideas regarding lithography. Blake attempts to galvanize artists working in a variety of media. He sees his mode of artistic experimentation in printmaking as attending to the problematic of the artist's impoverished place in society. Blake, while nevertheless privileging himself in inventing the idea, aims to liberate other artists through his art. He notes that even the two paradigmatic English authorial voices worked under conditions in the publishing industry that could inhibit the reception of voices.

Hence, printmaking and a sense of intellectual and artistic freedom moves to the center of Blake's theory. As a matter of fact, Blake would have been especially sensitive to the way in which artists' voices can be curtailed when at odds with the state-apparatus. Blake seeks to move artists beyond a position that, as David Bindman notes, "had the inevitable effect of putting the author at the mercy of publisher or middleman, who as a man of commerce either might not wish to print his work or, if he did so, would deprive

him of all profit.”⁶ In seeking to do so, Blake attempts to preserve artistic quality—drawing on the aesthetic argument of ornament as evidence—while contending that his artistic methods produce a work of art at a fraction of what the cost would be through standard means. The text drives to potentialize more artistic voices being heard, should it be made possible for them to afford to enter the culture industry of artistic production. Yet, if it is less expensive for artists to enter the industry, the corresponding implication will be that it will be less costly for an audience to engage with artworks. More people might be able to hear artists’ voices.⁷

Yet, Blake and Benjamin idealize the artist’s role in this regard. They place under critical erasure how the state-apparatus can circumscribe the limits of what is thinkable and articulatable in the first place. This comes independently of the possibility of expressing the artist’s free thoughts, whatever the medium. Yet, while keeping a critical perspective in mind, the ease and expense of printmaking, in general, and lithography, in particular, nevertheless make theoretically possible the existence of new artists and audiences.

Blake’s Foray into Lithography

In terms of lithographic type, Blake likely creates his design using the limestone technique. The impression of Blake’s lithograph known as “1B” features a verse caption on the verso side that describes the *Enoch’s* creation. Beginning with the lines “White

⁶ *Blake as an Artist* (London, United Kingdom: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1977), 41. Abbreviated *BA* and cited in-text, hereafter.

⁷ See also Alois Senefelder’s original reason for inventing the lithographic technique in terms of printing the plays he has composed. *The Invention of Lithography*, trans. J.W. Muller (New York, NY: Fuchs & Lang, 1911), 2-3.

Lyas—is the Block / draw with Ink composed of asphaltum,”⁸ the text indicates that Blake inscribes his lithograph upon a solid object. This most likely would have taken the form of a block of stone. Indeed, the limestone transfer technique, like copper plate etching and engraving, requires the artist craft the originating image in reverse relative to how it will ultimately appear on paper. As such, the mirrored reverse relation to the form the final print would take is broadly consistent with Blake’s printmaking practice. Blake’s engagement with lithography in terms of the stone technique preserves the “mirror-stage” dynamic involved in Blake’s artistic practice.

Additionally, Blake introduces significant changes to the technique in his execution of the *Enoch* design. In his catalogue of Blake’s separate plates, Blake scholar Robert N. Essick observes that “Blake drew his design with a mixture of asphaltum and lindseed oil, contending that “if [Blake had] not [deployed] the acid resist he actually used in his copperplate relief etchings, [it] must have been a liquid with very similar physical properties[,]” adding that Blake leaves out the use of gum arabic in his lithographic process, employing “only water to repel the printing ink from the uncovered surface of” his printing stone. The *Enoch*, therefore, represents something of a experimental hybrid in terms of Blake’s artistic practice. It collides a new artistic medium just being introduced into England with Blake’s own illuminated printing technique—which itself is in a state of flux at the time *Enoch* emerges with Blake experimenting with combining elements of relief etching and line engraving in *Milton*.

Indeed, the verses inscribed on the back of impression 1B of the *Enoch* crucially connect the lithograph directly to *Milton*, the illuminated book in which Blake’s idea of

⁸ Qtd in Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 55.

self-annihilation functions as thematic core. In “Book the First” of the work, the poet describes a process of artistic design that connects lithograph practice with drawing and Blake’s broader printmaking practice: “as the Artist his clay / Or fine wax, to mould artful a model for golden ornaments. / The soft hands of Antamon draw the indelible line: Form immortal with golden pen.” (*Milton* 28[30]:14-16, E 126). The poet equivocates, in a moment of artistic self-consciousness on drawing, aligning the process of creating a lithograph with a drawing instrument (“The soft hands of Antamon draw the indelible line: Form immortal with golden pen”) with sculpture (“as the Artist his clay”) and etching (“Or fine wax, to mould artful a model”), referring to the displacement of wax by the burin as the printmaker works the copper plate. As such, the *Milton* poet links the work with a multimedia range of artistic production through which it emerges, and of which *Enoch*—as an example of lithography, represents a part.

Lithography, at a conceptual level, moreover, accords with the largely entrenched linear pictorial style Blake had established some twenty-five years prior to the *Enoch*—itself another mechanism of meaning underpinning Blake’s art. The lithographic technique of using a tusche crayon to construct a visual image essentially forces the artist to focus her or his attention entirely on line, in relation to shading, when she or he produces a lithograph. As Blake writes in his *Descriptive Catalogue*: “[t]he more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art” (E 550).

Accordingly, Blake frequently equivocates in his writings on art between the linear aesthetics, germane to lithographic artistic practice, and what he regarded as high-art, contrasting linear to painterly approaches to line. For Blake, where “Theres no outline [...] All is Chiaro Scuro Poco Piu its all Colouring” (E 515). Conversely, Blake’s

lithograph—with its highly linear style—is congruent with Blake’s broader artistic project of re-visioning Neoclassical aesthetics on Romantic grounds, seeking to bring the viewer into a creative realization that “This world of Imagination is the World of Eternity it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body This World” (VLJ; E 69), which “manifests itself in Words of Art” (*Laocöon*; E 273). As scholar of British Romantic literature and the visual arts Morris Eaves observes, “[t]o accomplish that aim, a ‘correct outline’—for ‘correct’ here meaning true to the appearances of nature as we perceive it—becomes part of an artistic effort to bring the truth about nature[.]”⁹ Blake’s insistence on outline in artistic expression intersects a broader desire to draw together the imaginative and natural worlds of perception.

Blake’s *Enoch* and The Gothic

Blake’s *Enoch* draws extensively on Gothic architectural elements, a factor of Blakean artistic production the artist/poet was exposed to early and often at Westminster Abbey during his apprenticeship as a reproductive engraver under the antiquarian James Basire. The presence of the architectural plinth at the bottom center of the lithograph connects Blake’s image to a broader artistic discourse within the period concerning antiquarianism by way of its Gothic form (fig. 2.1). Indeed, the emergence of Gothic antiquarianism in the country corresponds to a broader cultural tide in England as artists turn



Fig. 2.1. Blake, *Enoch*, 1806-1807 (Detail)

towards the use of medieval monuments in a way that produces a new nationalist imaginary across the trajectory of the eighteenth-century, anticipating currents on the continent culminating in the nineteenth-century Gothic revival. Specifically, Blake

⁹ *William Blake’s Theory of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 4; 16.

structures the architectural plinth in the *Enoch* with a series of ogival and depressed Gothic arches, displaying an inconsistency in execution befitting Blake’s relative inexperience with the lithographic medium.

In this regard, Blake’s lithograph harkens back to work he did for the Society of Antiquaries as an apprentice in James Basire’s workshop. Namely, the plinth evokes Blake’s drawings of the tombs of Westminster Abbey, which, as David Bindman notes,

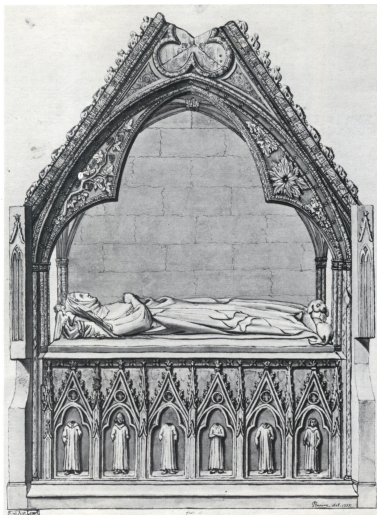


Fig. 2.2. William Blake, *Countess Aveline, Side View of Tomb*, 1773. Pen and sepia wash, 12.38 x 9.19 (31.40 x 23.30 cm.), Society of Antiquaries, London

“Blake was particularly enthralled by” during his artistic training in Basire’s workshop (*BA 12*). One such drawing that connects to Blake’s *Enoch* is Blake’s *Countess Aveline, Side View of Tomb* (fig. 2.2), from which Basire produced a print for James Gough’s *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain* on behalf of the London Society of Antiquaries. Blake painstakingly executes the decorative arcade supporting the Countess Aveline’s sepulcher, featuring round Gothic arches. Moreover, the image informs Blake’s use of a sculptural aesthetic in the

Enoch. As cultural historian Chris Brooks notes in his study of the Gothic revival, the whole notion of “the Gothic” becomes “inextricably linked to the myriad ways in which the present imagines its lost past.”¹⁰ Hence, the English play of the Gothic becomes a vehicle of national empowerment, projecting into the past a power with which to drive the present. It becomes a means of achieving what political scientist Benedict Anderson terms “an imagined political community” in the sense of being limited to a certain group

¹⁰ *The Gothic Revival* (London, United Kingdom: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1999), 4.

of people and sense of nationalistic sovereignty.¹¹ In drawing on the Gothic structures of Westminster Abbey, Blake's artistic training moves him through a process of enculturation constricted by the interests of the English nation-state and aligned with the sovereignty of British nationalistic interests Blake then, as an artist, negotiates.

By the same token, Blake takes part in a broader confluence of visual culture for which the English landscape artist, portrait painter, and occasionally printmaker

Thomas Gainsborough provides an illuminating, through contrasting, example. Gainsborough's 1780 print *Wooded Landscape with a Peasant Reading a Tombstone* similarly evokes

the Gothic (fig. 2.3). Here, the British artist draws on the archetype of the peasant. He appears close to the countryside, and is

pictured connecting to his English nationalist heritage by means of reading a tombstone in front of a nondescript Gothic cathedral, fusing the natural—in the form of the English landscape—and the human—in the form of the cathedral. Gainsborough obscures the writing on the tombstone's epigraph, which has the effect of etching out a free space for the viewer to fill vis-à-vis her or his own sense of the British nationalist imaginary. Gainsborough's Gothic print connects one to a present imagined community, via an engagement with an imagined medieval past—just as Blake's artistic training at Westminster does, which in turn influences the Gothic form of his *Enoch* lithograph.

Moreover, the presence of ogival Gothic arches links the *Enoch* to the plate



Fig. 2.3. Thomas Gainsborough, *Wooded Landscape with a Peasant Reading a Tombstone*, 1780. Etching with aquatint, 11.65 x 15.47 in. (29.60 x 39.30 cm.), Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, Suffolk

¹¹ See *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, United Kingdom: Verso, 1991), 6.

positioned as the viewer/reader's entrance to the culminating illuminated epic *Jerusalem*. Indeed, on the first plate of the work (fig. 2.4) the artist pictures the figure of Los/("imagination"). He is seen entering through a Gothic arch to begin the work of the artist Los moves to rupture "the mind forg'd manacles" that first come up in the 1789



Fig. 2.4. William Blake, Plate 1 from *Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, 1820. Illuminated Book, 8.78 x 6.38 in. (22.30 x 16.20 cm.), Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT

poem "London." The artist thus seeks to disassemble the limits of acceptable thought and action in the social sphere. This symbolized by the metal strictures depicted at the top right and middle left of pictorial space the image separates.

Accordingly, the Gothic plate—like the Gothic *Enoch*—stages artistic self-annihilation, with the presence of the Gothic arch being made to manifest a Blakean leitmotif of self-annihilation also at play in the lithograph. Los, as a figure,

telescopes, collapses, or otherwise annihilates the discrete functions of identity between artist and viewer. On the one hand, he represents the artist's presence, guiding the viewer through the artwork. On the other, he represents viewer the entering into the illuminated book. At a surface level, Los stands as Blake's imposition of himself into the work, a trope functioning in a manner broadly consistent with Romantic self-portraiture, where the viewer stands behind a proxy of the artist.¹² Here, the wide-brimmed hat serves to identify Los with Blake, as contemporary anecdotes about the artist's fashion sensibilities

¹² See for instance Caspar David Friedrich's paintings, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Clouds* (1818) and *Periods of Life* (1834).

make clear. Los becomes, in this respect, an autobiographical presence inscribed within the image.

In this regard, the frontispiece to *Jerusalem* resonates strongly with concerns expressed by the deconstructive theorist Paul de Man. Specifically, the plate encodes what I would term, following de Man, an annihilating destabilization of fixed and separate senses of identity the autobiographical trope necessarily implies. Blake inscribes himself into the artwork. He does so in terms of his own sense of his role as an artist whose life's work is that of social liberation. In de Man's view, moreover, autobiography as a Romantic trope itself destabilizes difference. Author/artist and reader/viewer collapse, as creating and interpreting subjects. For de Man, "[t]he autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution."¹³ While de Man's study concerns William Wordsworth's poetry, Blake's visual art—in this instance, and in the *Enoch*—functions similarly. The image self-consciously desires the viewer to think from the position of the artist in a way that she or he continues the artist's work, undercutting the privileged position of the former ("author") in light of the interpretive function of the latter ("reader").

Blake's image captures the viscosity of this dynamic in the figure's standing for both artist and viewer. The figure of Los, in standing for Blake as an imaginative artist, but not specifically being Blake, can stand for anyone with similar aspiration. As de Man notes: "The structure [of autobiography] implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject. *This specular*

¹³ *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, NY and Guildford, Surrey, United Kingdom: Columbia University Press, 1984), 70.

structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding.”¹⁴ As a reader takes in an autobiographical text (or a spectator takes in a self-portrait image), a process of interiorization occurs as an art object self-consciously inscribed with the artist’s self moves into viewerly consciousness. Slippage necessarily enters into the process. Understanding implies a movement towards thought that bridges past artwork and present interpretive act. As such, while the temporal polarities occupied by creator and interpreter are founded at different times, the difference is suspended across the trajectory of an artwork’s reception. Self-knowledge from the artist’s position becomes self-knowledge for the viewer’s. This, for de Man, “demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions.”¹⁵ Meaning is not static, closed, or ever total, but undermines itself by self-consciously, but in different ways, desiring further (re)construction by means of interpretive acts.

Blake’s Gothic entry into *Jerusalem* functions similarly. Interpreting the figure as artist, but also as viewer entering the artwork, shows that the Blakean artwork has already begun the process of deconstructing itself. The viewer is also simultaneously pictured entering the illuminated book. She or he, then, is positioned by the image to continue the artist’s work. The viewer moves, following the artist, to generate meaningful understanding that unshackles individuals within the field of culture. As such, artist and viewer at least seem to appear to stand on equal ground. Blake has already gone through

¹⁴ Ibid., My emphasis.

¹⁵ Ibid., 71

and created *Jerusalem*, but it will be the viewer who continues the work of creating it as the illuminated book is meaningfully engaged.

Most importantly, the Gothic in terms of Blake's idea of self-annihilation functions differently than it usually does when reinforcing ideologies of British nationalism. *Jerusalem* represents, with self-annihilation operating as a core central thematic, Blake's response to the Napoleonic wars, against which the *Enoch* is likewise positioned directly.¹⁶ War, in general, necessitates a process of cultural othering, and separation. For people to be willing to kill other people, the cultural others must be dehumanized in order to be re-conceived as objects in need of destruction. In short, a conceptual distance between Self and Other must be reified. Framed by a Gothic arch that likewise proliferates in the *Enoch*, the Blakean figure of Los deconstructs such a dehumanizing sense of distancing. Whereas warfare demarcates Self and Other as separate subjects comprising of national subject and national enemy, Blake's art marks Self and Other into coterminous subjects comprising artist and viewer. The two become essentially connected within the art in a way that desires a similar sense of interconnectivity beyond the artwork. In this regard, Blake's art moves against war and empire by means of self-annihilation as a conceptual vehicle that connecting, as opposed to separating, people.

Artistic Analogues: Flaxman and Fuseli

Generally, as visual studies scholar James Elkins charts, the respective pictorial styles of Blake and Flaxman converge with respect to a "negation of space" in their art,

¹⁶ See pages 53-56, below, for my reading of the lithograph as Blake's pacifistic response to the Napoleonic conflict.

with Flaxman’s “spatial tensions and ambiguities” anticipating Blake’s.¹⁷ Both primitivize artistic form with a flattening of spatial dynamics in the picture plane that brings out the corresponding flatness of the pictorial surface. More specifically, the stylistic relation between Blake’s lithograph and Flaxman’s art grows out of an artistic friendship the two establish during the brief time Blake spends as a student at the Royal Academy (BA 19). It was, perhaps, just after this time that Flaxman might have shown Blake proofs for his 1795 designs illustrating the work of the Greek tragedian Aeschylus, which David Bindman calls the “contemporary works of art most important to Blake” (BA 102).

Indeed, there are clear and important visual parallels and tensions that connect Flaxman’s “Chorus of the Theban Ladies” design to be later engraved with Blake’s stylistically similar lithographic experiment (fig. 2.5). Blake’s *Enoch* draws most peculiarly on the predominance of line and the presence of monumentality within the Flaxmanian image. In the Flaxman, line generates the symmetry that defines his design as a highly balanced composition. The forms of the human figures are also delineated by firm outline, as opposed to the coloristic shading. Moreover, the Flaxman—like Blake’s



Fig. 2.5. Thomas Piroli and Frank Howard (After John Flaxman’s 1795 Design), “Chorus of the Theban Ladies,” pl. 16 from *The Compositions from the Tragedies of Aeschylus*, 1831. Engraving.

¹⁷ “Clarification, Destruction, and Negation of Pictorial Space in the Age of Neoclassicism, 1750-1840,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 53 (1990): 564; 581.

lithograph—places the central figure on an architectural plinth. Yet, whereas Flaxman’s construction of the image draws upon the classical austerity of Doric form, Blake’s, in the *Enoch*, deploys the Gothic arch as device providing visual support.

Along these lines, Blake brings Fuseli’s Gothic style into play in crafting the *Enoch* lithograph. In particular, Fuseli’s 1796 painting “The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland



Fig. 2.6. Henry Fuseli, “The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches, 1796. Oil on Canvas, 40.00 x 49.75 in. (101.60 x 126.40 cm.), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

Witches” (fig. 2.6) helps to illuminate how Blake vigorous proclamation that “Gothic is Living Form” (E270) pertains to the *Enoch*. Fuseli’s painting, like Blake’s lithograph, centralizes an ambiguous source of light at the top center of pictorial space. Indeed,

both lighting sources resist logical explanation, in keeping with the thrust of the Gothic towards a displacement of the rational.

Moreover, as in the case of Blake’s lithography, Fuseli’s painting activates the viewer’s position outside pictorial space. Blake accomplishes this by having his central figure look just beyond, although not directly at, the viewer’s position. Fuseli, conversely, organizes his composition so that the figure wielding a dagger appears to be climbing in from outside the painting, from an imagined position below the viewer. Both Gothic artworks—although Fuseli’s is Gothic in a different sense—combine the irrational and a self-conscious sense of the continuing processes of an artwork’s becoming, as the work of art continues to unfold as viewer’s interact with it over time.

Moreover, Fuseli's own pair of 1803 lithographic experiments connect with Blake's lithograph, and were produced for the publication *Specimens of Polyautography* (1808)—for which Blake's own lithograph might have been likewise intended.¹⁸ The first, Fuseli's "Evening Thou Bringest All" (Plate 2), intersects Blake's lithograph in terms of the vegetation, pictured to the right of a figure who looks out a window into the natural environment. Additionally, Fuseli's "Evening" lithograph, like Blake's *Enoch* draws upon a graphic use of language. However, Fuseli seems to fail to account for the reversing, or mirror, quality, of the Bavarian stone transfer type of lithographic technique. As a result, the entirety of Fuseli's deployment of Ancient Greek reads in reverse, in opposition to Blake's, where only an intentional part of the graphic Hebrew is reversed.

Lastly, to explore another form of formal/stylistic resonance with Blake's lithograph, one finds an additional connection to Fuseli's "The Rape of Ganymede" (fig. 2.7). With regard to the issue of subject matter, Fuseli draws upon the classical myth of Ganymede, a mortal character who was taken up to Mount Olympus by Zeus, the highest god of the Greek pantheon, to be made immortal and serve the gods. In this respect, Fuseli takes up a similar theme that blurs the boundaries between God and man. Ganymede becomes a mortal made divine just as



Fig. 2.7. Henry Fuseli, "The Rape of Ganymede," 1803. Lithograph, 12.19 x 9.31 in. (30.96 x 23.65 cm.)

¹⁸ Raymond Lister, *Infernal Methods: A Study of William Blake's Art Techniques* (London: United Kingdom, G. Bell and Sons, LTD., 1975), 28.

Enoch becomes transported from the material world up to become a likewise divine figure. Accordingly, Fuseli's, "Ganymede" lithograph absorbs such a dynamic into the artist's Gothic form, participating in the prototypical trans-rational Gothic blurring of where earth ends and the supernatural, or heavens, begin. Fuseli, like Blake, desires to bring the divine and human spheres of existence into contact through his lithograph—albeit through classical subject matter.

To this end, the comparison of Blake's lithograph with the Neoclassical and Gothic art and subject matter of Flaxman and Fuseli, respectively, accords with Blake's critique of classicism, more generally. In the preface to Blake's *Milton*, the artist/poet speaks out against what he calls "The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid: of Plato & Cicero, which all Men ought to contemn: are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible" (M 1; E 95). Blake equivocates between the classical tradition, John Milton as his poetic predecessor, his artistic contemporaries, and the seemingly never-ending presence of war and violence that typify his historical space—from the French and American wars and revolutions through the Napoleonic conflicts that continue to rage at the time Blake produces his lithograph. As a result, Blake draws obliquely upon Flaxman's neoclassical style and Fuseli's Gothic content. However, Blake displaces it with biblical figures and Hebraic writings—all indicative of what Blake might have seen with "the Sublime of the Bible," against the "Perverted Writings" of classical antiquity, including Homer—which Flaxman was also illustrating at the time he produces the *Aeschylus* design. Blake turns towards the Gothic. The visual ambiguity and architectural form becomes a vehicle for representing and overcoming the perceived tyrannical rationality of classicism. Indeed, Blakean thought links classicism with the

misguided thinking and violence typifying the time, and against which Blake prophesied in both word and image.

Blake and the Hebraic

Blake also draws on his own previous artworks in crafting the lithograph. To create the iconography of the central Enoch figure (Plate 3), Blake re-appropriates a figure from the title page of his first experiment in illuminated printing, the 1788 *All Religions are One* (Plate 4). In a work that proclaims a central Blakean principle of subjectivity—that “As all men are alike (tho’ infinitely various) So all Religions & as all similars have one source / The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius” (E 2)—one finds a figure similar to the Enoch of the lithograph. Here the figure seems to have already absorbed the presumably religious book he holds, but has moved beyond mere textual engagement, and into a state of visionary inspiration. His gaze, like that of Enoch, thrusts outside the picture, but beyond the viewer’s position outside pictorial space.

Similarly, in crafting the hovering figures to the left and right of the



Fig. 2.8. Luigi Schiavonetti, after William Blake’s 1805 design, “The Meeting of a Family in Heaven” from the Illustrations to Robert Blair’s *The Grave*, 1808. Etching and Engraving on Wove Paper, 10.00 x 5.24 in. (25.40 x 13.30 cm.), Collection of Robert N. Essick, Altadena, CA

lithograph (Plate 1), Blake reuses figures from his 1808 illustrations to the Scottish poet Robert Blair’s meditation on the nature of death—“The Grave.” In particular, the floating bodies in the *Enoch* connect to the plate of Blake’s Blair illustration, titled “The Meeting of a Family in Heaven” (fig. 2.8). In that image, as

in Blake’s lithograph, hovering figures flank the picture’s central action. However, the floating figures in the Blair illustration do not interact with one another. They function

as static reflections of each other, a negative mirror-stage encounter within the image Blake elsewhere associates with “becoming what one beholds.”

Indeed, Blake presses the mirrored/reversing quality of the Blair illustration design into service with respect to his graphic deployment of Biblical Hebrew in the tablet the floating figures on the right read, in the lithograph. As I have previously indicated, and will further expand upon later, Blake plays with the act of inscription involved with the Hebrew across the trajectory of creating the *Enoch*. Specifically, Blake inscribes the Hebrew letter “י/(yod)” in “אלהים/(Elohim),” one word used for God in the Hebrew Bible, right-wise when originally applying the tusche to the lithographic printing stone. Consequently, the “י/(yod)” appears reversed on the final prints. As a result, the artwork generates a mirror-stage dynamic between the artist’s process of creative production and the viewer’s act of reception in interacting with the image.

Blake’s graphic deployment of Hebrew does, however, draw upon the factors of artistic production at play within the art historical context of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries (fig. 2.9). The English caricaturist and printmaker James Gillray employs an analogous use of graphic Hebrew generating an similar effect to that of



Fig. 2.9. James Gillray, *Light Expelling Darkness—Evaporation of Stygian Exhalations—or—The SUN of the CONSTITUTION, rising superior to the Clouds of OPPOSITION*. Published by Hannah Humphrey, 30 April 1795. British Museum, London

Blake in his 1795 print, *Light Expelling Darkness—Evaporation of Stygian Exhalations—or—The SUN of the CONSTITUTION, rising superior to the Clouds of OPPOSITION*.

Gillray, in *Light Expelling Darkness*, levels an artistic critique against the repressive measures Prime Minister William Pitt's Tory government imposes, although publishing the piece in the ultra-conservative *Anti-Jacobin Review*. As scholar of Romanticism and popular culture Ian Haywood notes, Gillray's art for the *Review* takes on the Pitt government's "momentous effort to extinguish radical politics in Britain," and the problem of "government repression [being] supported by a vigorous and resourceful print culture."¹⁹ Accordingly, Gillray's *Light Expelling Darkness*, like Blake's art, desires reversal and transformation within the field of culture.

Yet, Gillray veils the image's critical message in two ways. First, he does so by way of a complicating intertextual web of allusion. Pitt becomes pictured as a horseman of the River Styx in Hades. He guides a horse and a menacing looking lion towards darkness, and away from the image's light source. This comes in ironic contradistinction to the print's title. As Haywood notes, the image exhibits a "mock-exaltation of Pitt, who barely controls his careering chariot, 'the concomitant of terror'" in hell.²⁰ However, and of greater importance for the *Enoch*, Gillray's deployment of the graphic Hebrew represents a further complicating function of the image, resonant with Blake's lithograph. Gillray's graphic Hebrew encodes political balance as a critique of Pitt as an unbalanced politician. The Hebrew word "חכמה/("wisdom") appears within Gillray's construction of a circle—the illuminating force within the print—and surrounded by an orbiting flow of text that reads "COMMONS—KING—LORDS." While Pitt leads the viewer towards a darker and gloomier space, signifying problems related to Pitt's overly firm grasp on the

¹⁹ "'The dark sketches of a revolution': Gillray, the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, and the Aesthetics of Conspiracy in the 1790s" in *European Romantic Review* 22 (2011): 421-433.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 444.

British government in the wake of the French revolution, the play of graphic Hebrew offers a corrective that requires a wide range of knowledge to unpack.

The enlightened way out of present political crisis becomes predicated upon a wise balance of powers. The House of Commons, King, and the House of Lords should equally orbit around wisdom. This comes in opposition to the reality of a British nation being driven by a dictatorial prime minister, like Pitt. Gillray's image, like Blake's *Enoch*, acts as a transformative mirror for British society, with an engagement of Hebrew representing one part of the process.

While Romantic studies scholar and Lacanian psychoanalytic theorist Mark Lussier lucidly explains the mirrored writing dynamic relative to Blake's later use of the process with English verbal forms in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*,²¹ Blake actually begins to experiment with mirror-stage verbal language dynamics through his graphic uses of Hebrew, as early as the highly experimental initial foray into epic, the illuminated manuscript *The Four Zoas* (1797). Indeed, Blake's *Zoas* represents the Blakean artwork where the idea of self-annihilation first emerges. In the section marked "Night the Seventh," the poet describes Los moving toward "Self abasement Giving up his Domineering lust / [...] by Self-annihilation back returning to Life Eternal" (FZs 95[87]: 31-35; E 367-368). Blake's text transforms the idea of the Eternal in its general usage as something transcendent into something immanent, realizable in a refusal to dominate others. Within Blake's *Zoas*, the Graphic Hebrew meaningfully comes up on page forty-three (figs. 2.10 and 2.11). Here, the viewer encounters a Hebrew Bible Jehovah-esque figure, clutching a scroll, the text of which has been engraved straight-wise so that, when

²¹ See "'Vortext' as Philosopher's Stone: Blake's Textual Mirrors and the Transmutation of Audience" in *New Orleans Review* 13 (1986): 40-50.

printed, the Hebrew appears in reverse. Making sense of the graphic Hebrew’s meaning



Fig. 2.10. William Blake, Page 43 from “Night III” of *The Four Zoas* / Proof 108 to the Illustrations to Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, 1797. Line Engraving Surrounding Letter Press, Black Ink on Whatman Paper, 16.00 x 12.00 in. (40.64 x 30.48 cm.), British Museum, London

necessitates, as it does for Blake’s later use of the technique in English, the viewer’s active engagement with the visual image. She or he must either use a mirror to read the writing, or by reversing the writing in her or his mind, become one.²² Looked at in this light, it is Blake’s use of graphic Hebrew first utilized in *The Four Zoas*, but also pressed into artistic service in the *Enoch*, that draws the viewer in—provided she or he has a working knowledge of Hebrew. This form of visual encounter gestures powerfully towards the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan

Blake encodes what can be seen as a “*mirror*

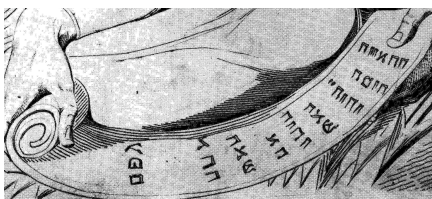


Fig. 11. Blake, Page 43 from “Night III” of *The Four Zoas*. Line engraving (detail)

stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term; namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he [or she]

assumes an image.”²³ Indeed, mirror-stage language dynamics are laid bare in English on plate thirty of

²² See *Ibid.*, 45. Note however, that in *The Four Zoas* Blake’s graphic use of Hebrew shows a total reversed quality, lacking the more subtle intentional quality of the *Enoch*. Yet, because the use of mirrored writing becomes a key mechanism of meaning across the Blake’s corpus, it still can be seen as more significant in Blake than when one finds a similar effect in an artist like Fuseli.

²³ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richer (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 1124.

Milton (fig. 2.12). This comes in the second part of the illuminated book. There, Milton brings about the apocalypse. He does so through the recognition of the importance of self-annihilation in artistic practice to make thematic space of the viewer’s creativity. The artist/poet’s inscription of the two

passages, “How wide the Gulf and Unpassable! between Simplicity & Inspidity” and “Contraries are Positives A Negation is Not a Contrary”

exhibits the mirrored quality of the act of printmaking. The



Fig. 2.12. William Blake, *Milton A Poem in 2 Books* (pl. 30), 1811. Relief and white-line etching, hand colored, 5.67 x 4.06 in. (14.40 x 10.30 cm.), Huntington Library, San Marino, CA (detail)

viewer/reader must engage with the image in a more active way than if the language was not reversed in order to grasp it. One function of the artwork’s meaning becomes the way in which it simultaneously generates a point of connection between viewer and object, by way of the viewer’s interiority, while desiring a transformation of thinking and being.

As a broader point of intersection, the interconnecting dynamic between psychoanalyst and patient forms the core of Lacan’s delineation of psychoanalytic practice—and, like Blake, “psychoanalytically prophesies” through an enigmatic open-ended construction of meaning. Specifically, Lacan’s “Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis” charts that the contemporary subject’s sense of “corporeal dislocation,” interiorized from the fragmented cultural field, might be effectively treated by means of a clinical practice predicated upon the patient’s relationship to images. Effective psychoanalysis, for the Lacanian, “set[s] out from their formative function in the subject” with the result that “it

is as variations of the matrices of those other specific images, which we refer to by the ancient term of *imago*, are constituted for the ‘instincts’ themselves” and that “this *imago* is revealed only in so far as our attitude offers the subject the pure mirror of an unruffled surface.”²⁴ The formation of one’s subjectivity—the way one thinks and how one continually forms one’s identity—emerges through a process of encounters with images, which form one’s instincts. The subject then becomes constructed out of images as mirror-stage encounters she or he has seen, created, and been formed through.

Then question, then, is: what mirror do you choose to (re)form yourself through? To pose the question relative to the present project, if the *Enoch* follows Blake’s *Four Zoas* as a transformative mirror-stage encounter for the viewer, and similarly anticipates Blake’s culminating epics *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, what type of transformation does Blake’s picture desire? The answers, I believe, are charted out in Chapters Three and Four that follow, in regards to artistic inspiration and ecology, respectively.

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, “Agressivity in Psychoanalysis” in *Écrits: A Selection* (New York, NY and London, United Kingdom: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977), 11;15.

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS AN AESTHETIC OF ANNIHILATION:

ENOCH, MILTON, & THE THEME OF SELF-

ANNIHILATION

Henoch lived, after he begot Methuselah, a godly life of three hundred sixty-five years:

when, having lived a godly life, *he disappeared; for God took him away.*

- Gen. 5:24 (Alexander Geddes, 1792 translation)

I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of inspiration

To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour - William Blake, *Milton A*

Poem in 2 Books (1811)

Opening, Co[n]textual, & Conceptual Matters

Having examined Blake's lithograph relative to issues of form and style, I will now make the pivot to the vital undertaking of establishing an iconographical interpretation of the *Enoch*. I accomplish this primarily by means of a close reading of the lithograph in relation to Blake's illuminated book *Milton*. In this respect, Blake's *Enoch*, like *Milton*, desires to inspire the viewer towards a mode of ethical thought predicated on seeing Others—human and environmental—as essentially united with the self. While ecological issues will be largely taken up in the fourth and final section of the thesis, for now the focus will be on the former. Blake's Hebraic *Enoch* encodes an interpersonal ethics that connects with a network of art and literature of the period and becomes

predicated upon a pacifistic point of view that profoundly gestures towards Blake's Christian epic, *Milton*.

Indeed, it is in this illuminated book that the paradigmatic Blakean theme of self-annihilation first comes about in its developed expression in the illuminated poetry. *Milton* traces the artist/poet's reception of the paradigmatic English bard of the Commonwealth and Restoration John Milton's influential national epic *Paradise Lost: A Poem in 12 Books*. Specifically, *Milton* encodes a (re)imagined persona of John Milton articulating a vision of apocalyptic redemption hinging upon humanity's shared capacities for creativity, creative production, and compassion. Namely, Blake sets out to generate a visual and verbal artwork re-visioning Milton's poetic legacy. In the artist/poet's response, Milton's literary work has abetted the rationalism of the Enlightenment. As such, it has set in motion the violence of both the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars.

A triptych of primary passages brings to light the central issues at play in *Milton*. In the first, Blake's "Milton" addresses a personification of Satan as both selfhood and the rational faculty vying for dominance within individuals. The Bard reveals early in the poetic text that "Satan is Urizen" (M 10[11]: 1; E 104) and later, in response, the Blakean Milton transformed by "the Bard's song" in the poem replies that "I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!" (M 14[15]: 30; E 108). The potential for what Blake's art exhibits as Satanic thought and behavior latently exists within everyone. The poetic interplay of the personal pronouns of identity "your"—as in "Urizen/(‘your reason’)"—and "I"—as in Milton's epiphany that "I am that Satan" becomes the reader's realization as she or he interacts with the text. The reader's "eye" that reads the page becomes

Milton's "I." The text implicates the reader in the way "Reason" desires hegemonic control over the self and other selves, as Blake's pun on "your-reason" signifies. Milton recognizes that he has been complicit with the Urizenic impulse, which his rationalist poetry has underwritten. Read Blake-wise, his poetry calcifies an isolated and disconnected sense of Selfhood.

Milton then, in and through Blake's artwork, moves to correct his errors, and restore a sense of cosmic interconnectivity to posterity. Constructed in poetic apostrophe, and pointing to Milton's climatic realization in the poem, Blake's precursor poet eventually asserts that "Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually / Annihilate himself for others good" (M 38[43]: 34-36; E 139). Defined from an elevated perspective, or principle of consciousness, the necessity of acting with a caring concern for others operates as the unifying principle of existence.

The illuminated book's climax, however, lends the greatest intensity to this movement. In it, Blake's Milton, asserts "Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man / All that can be annihilated must be annihilated / That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery." The text links self-annihilation to liberation. Milton then exclaims:

*I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour
To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration
To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration (M 40[46]: 35- 41[48]:
7; E 141-142).*

The *Milton* artwork reaches its crescendo when the poet realizes that "self-annihilation" functions equivocally as "the grandeur of inspiration." The poet connects self-annihilation with a movement beyond the Enlightenment period privileging of "reason."

Accordingly, the illuminated book directs a critical eye against rationalism as the Enlightenment cultural dominant, insofar as the British philosophers Francis Bacon and John Locke and physicist Isaac Newton symbolize worn clothing to be replaced. The poem, consequently, challenges the viewer/reader to, similarly, “cast off Rational Demonstration.”

In doing so, the space beyond rationality connects, also, to an idiosyncratic, fideist, artistically-infused Christianity (“by Faith in the Saviour”). As Blake studies scholar John H. Jones interprets this dynamic, the Blakean poetic text here distills the notion that “[t]he *inspired* author will restore and be restored to his or her rightful place in dialogue, while the finalizing voice of the author in Selfhood will be diminished,” and, likewise, that “the Saviour is not a ‘God afar off’ but resides within the bosoms of all individuals, [and that] this spirit of dialogue speaks through or with the individual who is in touch with this Divine Vision, the dialogically inspired poet.”¹ In this Blakean view, the end of art is not to produce an art object aimed at monological forms of spectatorship concerned with producing a single standard interpretation. It does not desire a form of engagement where the viewer judiciously reasons out an interpretation in line with social and religious dogma defined as the “rational right” to be internalized by individuals from the cultural field. Rather, the purpose of Blakean artistic production is about generating art objects that inspire an impetus towards further creativity in the viewer.

It becomes important, though, to temper an uncritical interpretation of Blake’s self-annihilative move towards creative inspiration. The idea of self-annihilation is not unique to Blake, and can also be seen as problematic in terms of how the Christian

¹ *Blake on Language, Power, Self-annihilation* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 163; 203.

artist/poet positions it within the cultural field. The idea comes up both trans-historically and geographically, in a wide range of cultural materials from texts by medieval holy women,² to Buddhist sutras. Even in academic art of the Romantic period, it can assume a central function. The radical academician James Barry crafts artistic self-annihilation into his 1803 self-portrait (fig. 3.1). Picturing himself with relation to the Romantic trope of a fragmented sculptural foot of a massive classical sculpture, Barry appears weary, wielding a recently completed canvas. He holds a paintbrush that also appears like a dagger, that points towards himself. It creates a diagonal that leads the viewer's eye to the artist's exhausted wrinkled face. In this regard, Barry appears to have emptied himself into his artwork, over exerting himself for his viewer's inspiration—and so has undergone an act of artistic self-annihilation for the viewer's benefit.

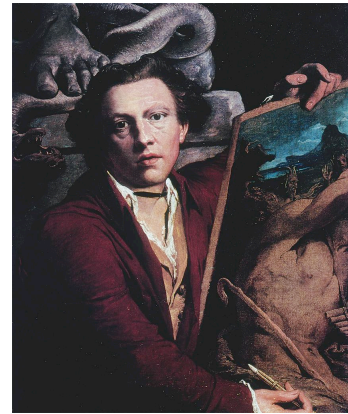


Fig. 3.1. James Barry, *Self-Portrait*, 1803. Oil on Canvas, 76.00 x 63.00 in. (193.04 x 160.02 cm.), National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland

Blake's idea of self-annihilation, likewise, appears similar to the English Romantic essayist William Hazlitt's literary response to the historical landscape the two share. Hazlitt's philosophical dialogue "Self-Love and Benevolence" stages a discussion between himself and the critic and publisher Charles Lamb. In it, Hazlitt argues that in using one's imagination to envision future events, "the chain of self-interest is dissolved and falls in pieces by the very necessity of our nature, and our obligations to self as a blind, mechanical, unsociable principle are lost in the general law which binds us to the

² See, for instance, Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*.

pursuit of good as it comes within our reach and knowledge.”³ The imaginative position of self to futurity activates an altruistic principle, for Hazlitt. The notion of Self short-circuits, and becomes annihilated, as one imagines a better future that necessarily links one to a better future for Others.

However, and when placed in comparison to other self-annihilative ideas from the period, Blake’s ideas prove problematic. The Blakean self-annihilative ethos is integrally connected to his commitments as a Christian artist. The thematic flow of self-annihilation through the Hebraic *Enoch* to the Christian epics *Milton* and *Jerusalem* circumscribes receptions of the artworks by viewers of different faiths and religious perspectives. Blake’s Koine Greek motto to *Jerusalem* reads: “ὁ μόνος ἰησοῦς,” or, “in Jesus Only.” As a result, while Blake’s self-annihilative art may seek to resolve cultural Otherness towards a utopian vision of spiritual unity, his art in some ways continues to underwrite the social problems of cultural uniformity it purports to correct.

Last, conceptually, in looking at how these dynamics comes about through the *Enoch*, iconographically, this section builds a conceptual framework for the interpretation of Blake’s art—and artists similarly engaged in explicitly multimedia artistic practices. Specifically, I move to build and expand upon the influential work of Blake scholars turned critical theorists Northrop Frye and W.J.T. Mitchell. In confronting the rich problem of image and text as it pertains to the Blakean canon, Frye and Mitchell advance the notion of “syncopation” between visual image and verbal text as a means of understanding the way Blake’s illuminated books are constructed. In doing so, the scholars re-appropriate a discourse from music theory, whereby a composer seeks to

³ William Hazlitt, “Self-Love and Benevolence” in *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2009), 170.

generate a more complex articulation of rhythm in her or his work thus attempting to raise a listener to a higher level of thought.

Frye first develops the idea of syncopation in his influential essay, “Poetry and Design in William Blake.” In it, Frye proposes that Blake, by situating an image at a disparate location in a given illuminated book from its textual referent, enacts a type of “syncopation” between design and narrative, resulting in the “bind[ing] of the whole poem together as a single unit of meaning,”⁴ For Frye, forcing the reader to unify an image with a text located elsewhere becomes a means for her or him to gain a more holistic sense of an illuminated book’s meaning.

Mitchell, however, renders the idea of a Blakean syncopation of design and text significantly more complex. In *Blake’s Composite Art*, Mitchell makes the point that it is “the introduction of iconographic disparities which complicate and attenuate our equations of text and design,” and that “produce a metaphorical richness which multiplies the independent complexities” involved in Blake’s artworks.⁵ In Mitchell’s delineation of Blake’s syncopation of image and text, meaning emerges from a complex and dynamic visual and verbal interplay. When one locates a point of resonance between permutations of text and image in Blake’s work, meaning might most effectively be located in the difference between the two. In any event, for both Frye and Mitchell, a key mechanism through which the Blakean art object generates its meaning is the way text and image can interact across the trajectory of a visual and verbal artwork of epic proportions. However,

⁴ Northrop Frye, “Poetry and Design in William Blake” in *Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), 119-125.

⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Blake’s Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 10.

as the *Enoch* will demonstrate, this syncopated dynamic can emerge, likewise, between a print and the illuminated books in a meaningful way, as well.

The Iconography of Annihilation

The iconographical presence at play in the lithograph moves to capture the importance of creativity, widely conceived, in relation to a move towards a more divine mode of existence. A self-reflexive presence of the arts proliferates Blake's construction of pictorial space (Plate 1). As Robert N. Essick notes, "youthful personifications of music, painting, and poetry" are of central importance to the *Enoch*, with "[t]he hovering figures in the print suggest[ing] the spiritual inspiration of prophecy and the arts."⁶ The lithograph centralizes Enoch as a self-annihilative biblical figure inspiring the arts.

In this regard, the iconography that Essick identifies syncopates, functioning



Fig. 3.2. Blake, *Enoch*, 1806-1807
(detail)

harmoniously, as Frye might say, with Blake's *Milton*. As the Bard asserts in the first part of the work, "Book the First:" "in Eternity the Four Arts: Poetry, Painting, Music, / And Architecture which is Science: are the Four Faces of Man" (M 27:55-56; E 125). In the

Enoch, as in *Milton*, and Blake's vision of Eternity, the arts become a means through which to attain a sense of identity in unity with the divine. The push to become inspired forms the nucleus of Blake's lithographic experiment, with an allegorical treatment of artistic media assuming a prominent place within the image. In addition, the sculptural style of the lithograph in general intensifies a rupture between differences in artistic practice, as the Classical is brought into play towards a Romantic end. Moreover, the

⁶ *The Separate Plates of William Blake* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 59.

lithograph connects this dynamic to identity transformation, more expansively. Enoch is a biblical persona who moves from Earth to heaven, without undergoing physical death, and, as such, intersects Blake's idea of self-annihilation (fig. 3.2). The Blakean Enoch can be seen as a type of God-man, in the sense of being a human that prefigures Christ in his ascension to heaven. Thus, it becomes interesting to look at Enoch, as the theologian and scholar of Blake's biblical hermeneutics Christopher Rowland does, seeing Blake's Enoch in the lithograph as "presented presiding over the arts."⁷ Within the image, artistic inspiration flows out from Enoch's position.

However, Blake's Enoch does not merely preside over artistic inspiration as an allegorized factor of artistic production within the image, but does so also without.

Blake repositions the thrust of Enoch's gaze across the interplay from preparatory sketch (fig. 3.3) to the lithograph, proper. In the sketch, Enoch's gaze is restricted to the text he wields, whereas Blake redirects his gaze in the lithograph outwards,



Fig. 3.3. William Blake, Preparatory drawing for the *Enoch*, Undated. Private Collection

exterior to the artist's construction of pictorial space. Yet, Enoch's transformed gaze does not directly engage the discrete viewer. It intersects the space both beyond and between individual viewing subjects. In other words, Blake constructs Enoch's gaze such that it engages its viewers together, as an interconnecting collective, as opposed to as discrete identities, as selfhoods cut off from one another.

⁷ *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven, CT and London, United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 2010), 106.

Moreover, the presence of any specifically divine presence is placed under artistic erasure in Blake's *Enoch*. To be sure, this is significant given Blake's Christian commitments, however idiosyncratic, and for whom, as the aphorism found in the *Laocoön* engraving goes: "The Eternal Body of Man is THE IMAGINATION. God himself that is The Divine Body} ן[ג]שׁ [Yeshua] Jesus we are his Members" (E 273). Blake undermines the idea of a Hebrew Bible Jehovah God by replacing such a concept of deity with a re-imagining of Jesus, whereby Blake's vision of Christ becomes the creative principle underpinning artistic production and (or as) an interconnecting and inspiring principle within whom all people might participate.

Such a dynamic intersects Blake's construction of the gaze in the *Enoch* image. While Enoch looks out from the lithograph, and between its spectators, he can likewise be seen as a Hebrew Bible patriarch be looking forward towards what Blake in *Milton* terms "Jesus, the image of the Invisible God" (M 2:12; E 96). Blake constructs Enoch as a figure that peers into futurity, foreseeing the coming of Christ. Jesus displaces Enoch as a self-annihilating precursor figure, just as Blake displaces Milton as a precursor poet.

The paradoxical presence of the Blakean Christ as a figure absent from the lithograph as the divine principle of imagination undermines the idea of a Hebrew Bible Jehovah God. In this respect, the *Enoch* lithograph can be seen as one factor of artistic production that connects to, and syncopates with, plate fifteen of Blake's *Milton* (fig. 3.4)—showing that syncopation does not merely occur within discrete illuminated books, as Frye and Mitchell suggest, but can also occur as ideas emerge between an illuminated book and another separate Blake artwork. The *Milton* plate fifteen image, specifically, shows Blake's Milton engaging in an act of self-annihilation, dismantling a false vision

of the Hebrew Bible God, in contradistinction to Jesus, identified by the presence of the ten commandment tablets, where Blake deploys a graphic use of Hebrew and a sculptural style in a manner similar to the lithograph. As was the case in terms of the iconography of the *Enoch*, the annihilated figure occupies the center of pictorial space. However, *Milton*,

in producing its meaning vis-à-vis the idea of self-annihilation in what Mitchell might term syncopated difference relative to the *Enoch* image, shows the self-annihilating figure actively engaged in the process. Milton's right foot ruptures the hyphenated word "Self-hood" in the picture's caption: "To Annihilate the Self-hood of Deceit & / False Forgiveness". More importantly, Milton's act of self-annihilation, with its corresponding

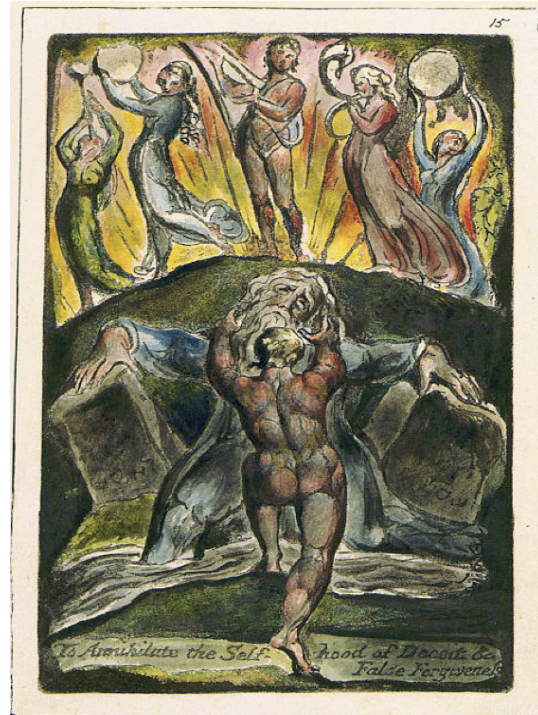


Fig. 3.4. William Blake, Plate 15 from *Milton: A Poem in 2 Books*, 1811. Illuminated Book, 6.65 x 4.33 in. (16.9 x 11.0 cm.), New York Public Library, New York

destabilization of the Hebrew Bible God, produces a cruciform shape at the nexus of the two bodies. This brings a profoundly Christian iconography into play within the image, simultaneously corresponding to the poet John Milton's christological poetic vision and *Milton's* central thematic.

Blake's *Enoch* & Milton's *Paradise Lost*: Sites of Pacifistic Resistance

Placed in historical perspective, the Blakean notion of self-annihilation corresponds to the artist/poet's broader critique of the history of ideas and thinking that in some ways lead to the wars of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries.

Specifically, Blake's Milton, responding to the "Bard's Song" realizes that the presence of classicism in his poetry has played a role in perpetuating the violence that rages across the continent and globe. As the poet observes, "Milton said, I go to Eternal Death! The Nations still / Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp / Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming." (M [14]15: 14-16, E 108). In a moment of Christological irony, Milton goes to return to materiality to undergo an act of self-annihilation so that others might live, re-visioning his legacy, with the "Gods of Priam" standing for his weaving of classical Greek and Roman culture into his poetry.

Yet, this dynamic in the *Milton* illuminated book emerges through the *Enoch* lithograph, as well. Indeed, Blake's *Enoch* absorbs its subject as a site of pacifistic resistance in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. There, Enoch comes into view as a central and paradigmatic example of a figure who is opposed to violence in Book XI of the epic poem and who himself also undergoes what might be seen as a process of self-annihilation in Milton's text. Enoch enters *Paradise Lost* at the point in the epic where, as Milton studies scholar Jason P. Rosenblatt notes, the archangel Michael becomes a "typologizing agent of the New Testament" and instructs Milton's Adam after the fall in Christian doctrine.⁸ Milton's Michael points to Enoch as an example of Adam's exemplary progeny whose righteousness gestures towards the coming of Christ.

Specifically, Milton's Enoch responds to a scene of brutal warfare Michael paints for Adam in the poetic text. The passage begins where the poet refers to two violent settings. In the first, the poet asserts that "One way a Band select from forage drives / A herd of Beeves, faire Oxen and faire Kine / From a fat meddow ground; or fleecy Flock, /

⁸ *Torah and Law in Paradise Lost* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 218.

Ewes and thir bleating Lambs over the Plaine” (Book XI, Lines 646-650). In this vision, a group of armed men races across the fields, laying waste to livestock along the way and, in doing so, moves to slay Christ in their brutality, as the lamb symbolizes. In the second, Michael speaks of an ambiguously defined city that “Lay [in] siege, encamped; by battery, scale, and mine, / Assaulting; others from the wall defend / With dart and jav’lin, stones and sulphurous fire; On each hand slaughter and gigantic deeds” (Book XI, Lines 656-660). Here, Adam witnesses a dreadful image, that, historicized, synchronically encodes the newly modern warfare of Milton’s time. In each vision, Michael exposes both Adam and, by extension, the reader, to a scene of hellacious violence.

Milton’s Enoch righteously intervenes, relative to both. Michael alludes to Enoch as Adam’s antediluvian descendent, saying that the violence continued:

[...] till at last
 Of middle Age one rising, eminent
 In wise deport, spake much of Right and Wrong,
 Of Justice, of Religion, Truth and Peace,
 And Judgment from above: him old and young
 Exploded and had seiz'd with violent hands,
 Had not a Cloud descending snatch'd him thence
 Unseen amid the throng: so violence
 Proceeded, and Oppression, and Sword-Law
 all the Plain, and refuge none was found (Book XI, Lines 664-73).⁹

Enoch vocally intercedes in the armed combat the poem details, seeking to cease the carnage, and, thus, brings wisdom, where there appears to be none, and Christological righteousness, where sadistic carnage abounds. Further on, the poem confirms this “one” figure’s identity as that of the Enoch of Genesis, alluding to the Genesis 5:24 verse

⁹ Citations from *Paradise Lost* are from *Paradise Lost*, ed. Scott Elledge (New York, NY: Norton, 1975).

Blake's lithograph illustrates: "Did, as thou saw'st, receive, to walk with God / High in salvation and the climes of bliss, / Exempt from death; to show thee what reward / Awaits the good" (Book XI, Lines 707-710; 278). Milton's Enoch comes to exemplify self-annihilation because he speaks from a space of non-violence. He follows the biblical admonition to "turn the other cheek," and by encouraging others to act similarly, independently of the repercussions for himself, is called up and saved by God ("him old and young Exploded and had seiz'd with violent hands, Had not a Cloud descending snatch'd him thence"). For Milton, Enoch's material selfhood becomes annihilated because Enoch's pacifistic righteousness anticipates that of Christ and the new covenant.

Such a dynamic focused on intense violence and pacifistic resistance would certainly not have been lost on Blake while working out *Milton*, an artwork that attacks, as the preface reads, those "who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War" (M 1[i]; E 95). Blake emerges as an artist from an interpreting community for which the historical horizon was defined by seemingly endless war and revolution and would have been particularly attentive to issues related to warfare in the literary texts that form a factor of his artistic production, as *Paradise Lost* does. Correspondingly, at this point in his career, Blake commits himself to the idea that by conceiving of war as a mental, as opposed to physical activity, war and violence as a mode of conflict resolution might be made a vestige of a barbaric past.¹⁰

In this regard, Blake's art exists somewhat in relief to other forms of English cultural production in the period supporting the state-apparatus by underwriting the nationalistic fervor and violent patriotism that swept across Great Britain in response to

¹⁰ For another Blakean response to the Napoleonic wars from this time in the artist/poet's career, see Blake's c. 1805-1809 tempera on canvas painting *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan*.

the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars on the continent. As the patriotic anti-Napoleonic poet and propagandist William Thomas Fitzgerald's wrote for *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1803: "BRITONS, to ARMS! of apathy beware, / And let your COUNTRY be your dearest care; / Protect your ALTARS! guard your monarch's Throne, / The Cause of GEORGE and Freedom is your own!"¹¹ Fitzgerald's poem—a veritable "call to arms" the poem's severe capitalized typography visually intensifies—captures the sense in which much of the British mainstream responds to the instability of the period with a move towards combining British national identity with violent impulsivity and a further entrenchment of hierarchical authority. The move to "ARMS" defines the English nation-state, and it is in armed service to the country for which British energy should be expended. In Fitzgerald's view, the very existence of Anglican institutional structures is at stake ("Protect your ALTARS"), and he equivocates between "The Cause of GEORGE" and "Freedom." Here, by Fitzgerald's appallingly twisted logic, to be forcibly conscripted to fight the French and protect the King is to be liberated.

For Blake, conversely, by fighting "mental wars" one can forgo "corporeal" ones. Moving towards a state of mind where one embodies self-annihilation, and so relinquishes the illusion of a solitary selfhood, and realizes one's essential interconnectivity with others, becomes the mental vehicle for participating in activism against war. In this regard, the *Enoch* lithograph connects Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Blake's *Milton*. In like manner, Blake takes the hierarchy Fitzgerald's poem implies and deconstructs it. The verticality of service, in terms of King above Self, becomes equitably

¹¹ *Romanticism: A Sourcebook*, ed. Simon Bainbridge (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 51-52.

horizontal, in terms of artist and viewer, the idea of self-annihilation insists upon in the *Enoch* and *Milton*, respectively.¹²

Breaking the Manacles of a Mind “Lock’d Up:” Mirrored Hebrew

Yet, Blake’s *Enoch* does not merely express a desire for the viewer to realize her or his connection with others through its relation to *Paradise Lost*. It programs this, also, on the level of artistic practice through the Graphic Hebrew play of mirrored writing. In this way, Blake’s *Enoch* manifests itself as an artwork that self-consciously invites the viewer to become an active participant in how it generates its meaning. It forges a meaningful and non-hierarchical relationship between artist and viewer, co(n)fusing essentially related and conterminous entities of creating artist, viewing subject, and art object. Subject and object are drawn together.

The hovering figures on the right of Blake’s construction of pictorial space (fig. 3.5) illustrate this point. Specifically, the two engage with a fragment of the Enoch Hebrew Bible text (fig. 3.6). In dialoguing with one another, the hovering figures show the possibility of intellectual re-



Fig. 3.5. Blake, *Enoch*, 1806-1807 (detail)

evolution being garnered through a process of interpersonal interaction. The figure on the right appears to point to a section of the text while the figure on the left turns to speak with the figure on the right. Yet, as Romantic and Judaic studies scholar Sheila A. Spector notes in her article “Blake’s Graphic Use of

¹² For another image from this time in Blake’s career critiquing state-apparatuses in a similar way, see the tempera painting *The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth* (1805). Note as well that Blake’s *Pitt*, like *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan*, was part of Blake’s failed 1809 show at his brother’s house that was both panned when reviewed in *The Examiner* and remarkably unattended, further showing the impossibility of Blake’s art, including the *Enoch*, having the effect desired upon the social sphere.

Hebrew,” אלהים/ (“Elohim”) omits the Hebrew letter “yod.” Spector contends that in the figures’ “anxiety about the material manifestations of the word [they have] apparently overlooked the omission in their text of the ם which is the third letter (trinity) of the first word (God) in the biblical text.”¹³ For Spector, Blake utilizes Hebrew in the lithograph to experiment with numerology in a way that absorbs practices of the Jewish Kabbalah into his art while gesturing towards the notion of the spiritual in divine revelation with a corresponding move beyond the letter of the law.



Fig. 3.6. Blake, *Enoch*, 1806-1807 (detail)

However, Blake’s deployment of Hebrew is more complex than this, and, to build and addend a minor correction to Spector’s foundational work, Blake has actually inscribed the yod, but right-wise when applying the tusche to the original limestone the lithograph was printed from, so that its mirror-image on the *Enoch* art object—as we see it—is inverted. Indeed, one can see this in the interplay between the word “כילקה” on the first line and אלהים, on the second—whereby the ם (“yod”) appears correctly facing left in “כילקה” and as reversed in “אלהים.” As a result, Blake’s *Enoch* exhibits a meaningful distortion of the graphic Hebrew, imbuing the Hebrew Bible text with a Christian meaning. Indeed, in building upon Spector’s interpretation of the image, the idea of self-annihilation in the Enoch text necessitates a Christ-like commitment to others for it to become inspired. Blake, by inscribing the yod in reverse—in a crucial moment of artistic self-consciousness—undermines his privileged position as creative artist. The artist/poet

¹³ “Blake’s Graphic Use of Hebrew” in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* (2003): 17.

sacrifices himself, entering his own death, in creating a dynamic work of art requiring its audience for its completion. The artist's importance is destabilized as the viewer must effectively reverse the letter in her or his mind in order to render it comprehensible and becomes an essential and interconnected entity through which the artwork's meaning emerges.

On the other hand, conversely, Blake's lithograph fails in this regard. Few viewers, of those who would have even had interest in Blake's art at the time, would have had the requisite knowledge of Hebrew to activate this function of the lithograph's meaning. As such, Blake as an artist continues to occupy a privileged position, given the elitist sense of knowledge the ability to comprehend literary Hebrew represents. A mirrored play of graphic Hebrew to stimulate viewer creativity and realize their interconnectivity could not have succeeded, as could most any aspect of Blake's utopian vision on a substantive scale.

Nevertheless, in doing so, Blake moves to interweave the connecting presences of (viewing) subject and (art) object, broadly intersecting a push back against the alienating force of first-stage Enlightenment epistemology predicated upon a reified split between subject and object running from the French rationalist René Descartes through the English empiricist John Locke. As Descartes famously delineates in his *Principles of Philosophy* (1644): "I am thinking, therefore I exist." Descartes then goes on to insist that his *cogito ergo sum* epiphany represents the foremost way to discover both "the nature of the mind and [the] distinction between the mind and the body."¹⁴ Yet, the

¹⁴ René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 195. My emphases.

Cartesian argument demarcates the position of a solitary thinking human subject as the very crux of thought. In doubling the first person pronoun of identity (“I”), Descartes simultaneously emphasizes and isolates the thinking subject, dividing her or him from the others she or he interacts with, and—in terms of Descartes’s representation of nature—the environment the subject participates in, comprises, and is comprised of. In other words, Descartes privileges human interiority with “nature” becoming a point of cascading alienation from others, whereby the mind becomes, likewise, divided from the body in the Cartesian vision of things, against which Blake’s art directly rebels.¹⁵

Indeed, the English empiricist philosopher—and perhaps Blake’s foremost intellectual contrary—John Locke underwrites such a Cartesian problematic in his own philosophy, relative to both his epistemology and theory of communications. As scholar of modern philosophy Peter A. Schouls, observes, the crux of Locke’s philosophy essentially rests on his ability to absorb and apply Cartesian epistemology and methods, adapting each to his own ends.¹⁶ It is along these lines that Locke’s theory of knowledge perpetuates the Cartesian subject/object divide. As much becomes evident in Book II of Locke’s *Essay*. The “*Understanding*,” as Locke describes it, becomes “merely passive” insofar as “the bodies that surround us do directly affect our organs, and the mind is forced to receive its impressions; and cannot avoid the perception of those *Ideas* attached

¹⁵ See, for instance, “The voice of the Devil” section in *The MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL*: “All Bibles or sacred codes. have been the causes of the following Errors. / 1. That Man has two existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul” for which Blake’s text offers the corresponding correction, “1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld body is a portion of Soul” ([MHH] 4; E 34).

¹⁶ See *Reasoned Freedom: John Locke and Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 1-3; 9.

to them.”¹⁷ Here, Locke splits off the primacy of the object from the process of its reception from the position of the observing subject. From there—in a Lockean conception of things—the subject necessarily enters into a passive interaction with an object of observation. Within Locke’s Cartesian vision of things, subject and object are divided. The latter is static, impressing itself upon the former. For Locke, the interaction between subject and object is by no means dynamic; instead, it stagnates.

Such a Lockean problematic results in minds that reflect where, as Blake puts it in *Milton*, “*Urizen* lay in darkness and solitude. in chains of the mind of the mind *lock’d up*” (M 3:7; E 96, my emphasis), a situation that, likewise, extends into the realm of communications theory, against which Blake’s art in general, and the *Enoch*, specifically, level correctives. As communications studies scholar John Durham Peters points out, that in Locke’s playing a “key role in inventing and legitimating the individual” the theory of sensation found in his thought “allows Locke to minimize the social or intersubjective aspects of human knowing.”¹⁸ Read from the position of his Romantic critics, Locke’s focus on the individual problematizes the very possibility of effective communication to the extent the Locke centers his vision of selfhood entirely on the notion of an individual conception of self, to the exclusion of that self’s essential interconnectivity with others.

Indeed, as much emerges also in the *Essay* where Locke purports “to find wherein *personal identity* consists[,]” arguing that “we must consider what *Person* stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can

¹⁷ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 118. Hereafter, cited in-text and abbreviated “ECHU.”

¹⁸ “John Locke, The Individual, and the Origin of Communication,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75 (1989): 388; 390.

consider itself as it self' (*ECHU* 335). In developing his theory of self, which resonates strongly with the Cartesian cogito in its building of rationalistic impulse into a Lockean empiricism, Locke creates an endlessly self-referential closed loop circuit that defines his conception of selfhood. Locke's notion of self becomes alienated, and effectively divided from it/self—that is from a contestably more authentic conception of Selfhood generated from the Self's inherently interconnected position vis-à-vis the position of the Other. Looked at from the perspective of communication, such an idea would inhibit, rather than invite, the requisite understanding of the inherent interconnectedness of Self and Other effective meaningful correspondence necessitates.

Blake's *Enoch*, conversely, and in generating an interpersonal ethics, deconstructs precisely such a notion of a mind "Lock'd" up. It positions itself as an artwork that strongly desires viewerly interaction in the way in which it generates its meaning. As such, it invites the viewer to assume an artistic function, both in actively reversing the mirrored Hebrew and in terms of the allegorical forms of artistic, literary and musical production that proliferate throughout *Enoch's* visual space. In this respect, the lithograph enacts a form of rupture against the Cartesian fissure of subject and object Locke's philosophy underwrites, which would insist on the separation of the functions of artist and viewer. What emerges, then, is an image the iconological function of which is to inspire its viewers towards an interpersonally connected vision of living. In relation to historical matters that lend this theme with some urgency—that war and violence seen most essentially result from human beings not recognizing the ways in which they are inherently connected—the *Enoch* likewise urges the viewer to re-cognize her or his essential connectivity with Others. Yet, while the lithograph thrusts towards such an

epiphany regarding human Others, its ecological content likewise illuminates new ways of thinking about environmental Others as well, and it is to this matter the thesis turns to finish.

CHAPTER IV

A PERCEPTION DI-VINE: ECOCRITICAL

CONCLUSIONS

The rhetoric of nature depends upon something I define as an *ambient poetics*, a way of conjuring up a sense of a surrounding atmosphere or world
-Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (2007)

Where man is not nature is barren – William Blake, *THE MARRIAGE of HEAVEN and HELL* (1794)

Blake's *Enoch* & Ecocriticism

The Post-Cartesian play of subject and object Blake's lithograph engages in brings the image into the orbit of ecological concerns. The same thinking that splits humans from humans, in terms of the subject/object fissure, splits humans from the natural environment. Hence, the *Enoch* invites a further interpretive approach that draws on ecocriticism as a conceptual framework accounting for the relation of cultural production to the natural environment. As ecocritic Timothy Morton defines the exercise, "[e]cological writing is fascinated with the idea of something that exists in between polarized terms such as "God and matter, this and that, *subject and object*."¹ Blake's *Enoch* is an object that, as we have seen, occupies this interspace—drawing together God and man, in the figure of Enoch, and subject and object, in the mirrored

¹ *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 15. Cited in-text, hereafter, as "*Ecology*."

graphic Hebrew. Moreover, ecologically engaged iconography proliferates the artwork. An interconnecting flow of creative subjectivities that gestures towards the theorist Félix Guattari's work takes shape in the artistic allegorical figures surrounding Enoch. Additionally, one of an impressive ecologically charged presence takes shape in the Christological grapevines that form the image's border (Plate 1). These vines direct the viewer's eye heavenwards and recall the decorative arrangements found in medieval manuscripts, suggesting the theme of climbing heavenwards by being infused with the power of Christ. In this sense, the *Enoch* image imagines the possibility of a "di/vine" type of perception. That is, a self-annihilative form of thinking that shatters alienated types of perception where one sees oneself in a state inherently divided from others, not just interpersonally but in terms of the environment as itself a type of cultural Other, as well—with the lithograph eliding differences between the human and the natural. The vines powerfully build a presence of the natural environment into the lithograph. In short, the vines gesture towards the possibility of an ecocriticism of the visual image. As a result, I turn to conclude the thesis in an admittedly largely gestural way by seeking out directions ecocriticism might expand into with regard to visual culture by way of Blake's *Enoch*.²

Of course, until very recently, Blake was seen as anomalous in canonical constructions of English Romantic literature for his—at least superficially—oppositional view towards nature. Whereas poets like William Wordsworth speak of "high objects, with enduring things / With life and nature, purifying thus / The elements of feeling and

² In this regard, I build upon a body of materials begun by art historian Alan C. Braddock and American and Canadian literary historian Cristoph Irmscher co-edited volume *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009) and Stephen F. Eisenman, *From Corot to Monet: The Ecology of Impressionism* (New York, NY: Skira, 2010).

of thought,”³ and so cultivate a poetics predicated upon a re-turn to the natural environment as a source of artistic inspiration, Blake seemed to offer forth only the anthropocentric view that nature was meaningless without the human. Moreover, Blake differs vastly from the forms of ecologically engaged art and theory of his contemporaries. The Blakean critique of British nationalism and the leisure class places Blake very much at odds with his ecologically engaged English contemporaries like William Gilpin, in terms of that artist’s picturesque aesthetic geared towards promoting rural tourism, and the designer Humphry Repton, who shaped gardens and images with ideas of luxury and human consumption firmly in mind. Blake not only differs from but also largely predates the ecological intensity to be found in the site specificity of John Constable’s Suffolk rural landscapes and J.M.W. Turner’s emotive painterly engagements with nature. Last, Blake’s disparate position, both geographically and temporally, render his art distinct from both the German Romantic painters Phillipp Otto Runge and Caspar David Friedrich and the American Romantic painters Thomas Cole and George Innes.

Yet, the range of Blake’s writings display a much more complex, nuanced, and multivalent view of nature than what Blake’s interpreters arrive *via* the “Where Man is not nature is barren” proverb alone. Blake writes in a 1799 letter to one of his patrons, the reverend Dr. Trusler that “to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is so he sees” (E 702). As Mark Lussier notes, interpreting the Dr. Trusler letter, “[f]or Blake, mind finds affinity with nature so long as their free play

³ *The Prelude*, “Book First,” Lines 409-411.

opens onto infinite perceptual possibilities for a visioning subject.”⁴ An interpenetrating sense of subjectivity between the human and the natural environment represents the crux of an ecological tendency in Blake’s art.

Yet, the few studies of Blake cognizant of the ecological intensity integral to the artist/poet’s work have focused almost solely on Blake’s poetry. In cases where the visual has been brought into play it has tended to be problematic in two ways. First, it has been single-mindedly limited to Blake’s own art. Ecocritical work in Blake studies fails to account for Blake’s position within the broader confluence of nineteenth-century visual culture. Second, and more essentially, it has ignored issues of materiality which assume a more prominent position in visual than in literary artistic production.⁵ Hence, the section begins with a move to utilize the *Enoch* to imply the possibilities of a visual ecocriticism in terms of the materiality of printmaking.

Towards an Ecology of the Visual Image: Materiality & Blake’s *Enoch*

To begin crafting an ecocriticism for the interpretation of visual art, whereby literary ecocriticism might be expanded, one must begin to understand the limitations of literary ecocriticism when applied to a different mode artistic production, where the materials and functionality of sign systems differ significantly. In the introduction to her monumental work in the field *The Ecocriticism Reader*, a key book that largely endowed contemporary literary ecocritics with the necessary tools and examples to

⁴ “Blake’s Deep Ecology” in *Romantic Dynamics: The Poetics of Physicality* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 53.

⁵ See especially Kevin Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake’s Environmental Poetics* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002).

cultivate sustained work in the field, literary ecocritic and scholar of American literature

Cheryll Glotfelty poignantly asks:

What then *is* ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies."

Ecocritics and theorists ask questions like the following: How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?⁶

As Glotfelty defines it, ecocriticism as a subfield of English literary studies examines how the physical environment becomes absorbed into fields of literary representation. Judiciously, Glotfelty aligns the emerging field with conceptual frameworks her audience would be familiar with, placing literary ecocriticism alongside feminist modes of literary inquiry and Marxist theoretical frameworks that allow readers to rigorously think through issues of gender and class as they are manifested in literary texts. In relation to these standard modes of literary analysis, Glotfelty adds ecocriticism as a way to engage with texts that center upon the earth. Ecocritically-minded scholars, as Glotfelty imagines them, move to interrogate how authors re-present nature in their literary art. They show how the physical setting impacts the flow of plot and interactions between characters. Crucially, in this framework, ecocriticism ought not only consider only how nature becomes (re)presented and encoded within texts as metaphor, but how the figuration of

⁶ "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis" in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii. Hereafter abbreviated as "ER" and cited in-text.

nature in literary texts in turn influences how human/environmental relations are configured within the cultural field.

Yet, ecocriticism, in Glotfelty's delineation, need not end with literary studies. Indeed, Glotfelty goes on to ask the interdisciplinary question: "[w]hat cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, *art history*, and ethics? (ER xix, my emphasis)." Indeed, Glotfelty zeros in on Art History as one mode of intellectual disciplinary practice where ecocriticism might be deployed relative to the space where "energy, matter, *and* ideas interact." However, while some work in this direction has been made, as I have indicated above, zones for ecocritical engagement in Art History largely remained to be opened some fifteen years after Glotfelty and Fromm's influential volume.

To move from theory to application, one area in which visual artistic production challenges literary ecocriticism is in the way it necessitates a greater attention to materiality on the part of the interpreter than does literary artistic production, generally. Thus, a visual ecocriticism requires a greater move beyond mimesis, which forms the core of Glotfelty concerns, to something other. In this regard, Blake's *Enoch* exhibits an ecologically integral play of materiality that exceeds that of his other work; the material out of which the image is created immediately connects with the material the image represents. The artwork depicts the Hebrew patriarch placed on a stone plinth (Plate 1). Indeed, Blake's *Enoch*, as a limestone transfer lithograph, connects the artistic process through which it emerges to that which becomes represented within it. Thinking in terms of the sourcing of artistic materials, the printmaker's deployment of a prepared limestone likely culled from a nearby quarry surpasses the use of copper plates as a form of

originating support for the image. The raw materials required for copper plate engraving requires more invasive mining and presumably greater processing for natural resource to be turned into artistic material.⁷ Conversely, the natural resource used to produce the originating support of the lithograph medium would have been sourced closer to Blake's London and connects with the natural resource depicted in the lithograph, in the case of the stone plinth.

In this respect, Blake's *Enoch* gestures towards Morton's contemporary ecocritical theory of what he terms, an "ambient poetics." Specifically, Morton argues that nature itself constitutes an integral part of any medium. For Morton, "Nature [itself] is a surrounding medium that sustains our being" (*Ecology* 4). All art—literary, visual, or aural—arises within a physical environment that, at an essential and fundamental level, makes possible the conditions for its existence. Blake's lithograph exhibits a form of artistic self-consciousness that embodies this dynamic. It connects nature as a medium that underpins all art, the materials one uses as an artist, and the object of artistic representation. The lithograph integrally correlates its originating stone-based materiality and the stone architecture the lithograph represents. Indeed, and in an intense connection, most Gothic cathedrals were, in fact, constructed out of limestone. Blake's limestone-based lithograph partakes of precisely the same substance as the Gothic architecture it (re)presents.

⁷ Blake, like Goya, used copper plates produced by the British manufacturer Pontflex. One can speculate that the copper for Blake's practice might have been sourced from Cornwall, the largest copper mine in England and notorious for the industrial scene the mine represented in the English countryside, powered as it was by more than 100 steam engines.

Yet, placed in its proper context within the field of nineteenth-century visual culture, the ecocritical content Blake's lithograph reflects the work of other artists experimenting with the medium in the period. The play of stone-based materiality in Blake's *Enoch* connects with the Anglo-American painter and second President of the British Royal Academy of Arts Benjamin West's 1801 lithograph, *The Angel* (fig. 4.1).

West's lithograph, a biblical illustration in much the same vein as Blake's, images the angel present at Christ's sepulcher in *Matthew* 28:6 and depicts a moment of spiritual transformation after the moment in the biblical story where Christ has risen from the dead. While the dynamic is illustratively centered in the vortical presence that leads the viewer's eye heavenwards through the left of pictorial space, the artist grounds the angel on a large rock. Yet, Blake goes further than West, since stone, in actuality, has none of the limestone, which Blake's



Fig. 4.1. Benjamin West, *The Angel*, 1801. Lithograph, 12.75 x 9.00 in. (32.39 x 22.86 cm.)

lithograph connects with the natural resource underpinning the Gothic.

Furthermore, while Blake draws upon the 1788 frontispiece to *All Religions are One* (Plate 3) to produce the lithograph's iconography, the ecological implications of the materialities comprising the two images differs vastly. In the earlier print, the plinth the Hebraic patriarch sits on emerges from etching on copper plate. Conversely, in the lithograph, the stone plinth emerges from drawing directly on a stone. The *Enoch* lithograph treats the subject with a greater degree of integral medium specificity relative to the architectural object represented than the earlier etching. In the former, copper

becomes stone. In the latter lithograph, stone becomes stone. Integral ecological form becomes central to Blake's *Enoch*.

Conclusion: (Eco/Iconographical) Vectors of (Inter)Subjectivity

Yet, the ecological implications of Blake's lithograph extend from issues of materiality to issues of iconography. Correspondingly, a translation of the *Enoch* into a series of sign-systems reveals that the artwork anticipates the ecological ideas of the post-structural psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari. The way Blake's allegorical figures function represents an interconnecting flow of creative subjectivities orbiting Enoch as a subject having undergone an act of self-annihilation, gesturing towards Guattari's ideas regarding intersubjectivity that forms the core of the philosopher's ecological theory.

Specifically, this ties into Guattari's 1989 work *The Three Ecologies*, where the theorist moves to begin engaging with the contemporary environmental crisis. Guattari starts the text by positing that "The Earth is undergoing a period of intense technological transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet's surface."⁸ Guattari implicitly levels his critique against the ideology of industry. He targets the transformation of the earth by means of an increasingly forceful and unsustainable implementation of the instruments of science and technology, fearing a disastrous disruption of balance in the natural environment.

⁸ Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Gary Genosoko (London, United Kingdom: Continuum, 2008), 27. Hereafter, cited in-text as "3E".

As a result, Guattari comes up with the idea of what he terms *Ecosophy*. The psychoanalyst/philosopher etches out such an idea in relief to “a partial realization of the most obvious dangers that threaten the natural environment of our societies” with the beginnings of a social/cultural awareness of environmental issues stemming from a position “content to simply tackle industrial pollution and then from a purely technocratic perspective” (3E 28). An authentic ecological theory conversely, for Guattari, stems from a commitment to dislodging the industrial *status quo*. It necessitates a new “ethico-political” articulation—with *ecosophy* functioning to connect “three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity).” The thinking subject, for Guattari, becomes the nexus where the environment and social sphere might be brought into a more integral and sustainable form of alignment.

Guattari then implicates a collective vision of humanity in his critique. He argues that “[a]longside these upheavals, human modes of life, both individual and collective, are progressively deteriorating” (3E 38). For the promise of social progress and collective upward social mobility the ideology of industrialization promises, in reality what unsustainable practices precipitate is an alienation of people from themselves. As Guattari later states, looking at labor issues, “[t]hrough the continuous development of machinic labor, multiplied by the information revolution, productive forces can make available an increasing amount of time for potential human activity.” Guattari then asks, “But to what end? Unemployment, oppressive marginalization, loneliness, boredom, anxiety, and neurosis?” Unsustainable industrialization alienates humanity from itself. It produces a cascade of new technologies through machinic labor, with the new technology in turn increasing productivity in a way that eliminates the need for further labor. People

become alienated in their marginalization. Uncreative in unproductivity, humanity atrophies.

Blake responded similarly to the industrial cultural upheaval that typified his position in history, with a similarly alienated work force caused by unsustainable uses of resources and reorganization of industry after James Watt's invention of the steam engine. In the preface of *Milton*, the poet, evoking the cotton textile mills littering the English countryside and typifying the Industrial Revolution asks, "was Jerusalem builded here, Among these dark Satanic Mills?" (1: 7-8; E 95). In other words, with Jerusalem symbolizing liberty within the artist/poet's mythology, *Milton* thrusts towards the amelioration of the plight of a displaced alienated labor force as new technologies were pressed into service to increase industrial production (the "dark Satanic Mills"). To build a "New Jerusalem" is to bring creativity and art to a culture that, in the face of industry and environmental degradation, deteriorates.

Guattari, like Blake, in response to a historical context where the mechanizations of industry divides humanity from the natural environment with the result that both are reduced to mere resource to drive always expanding technologies, moves to radically rethink what it means to be a self in relation to Others—environmental and interpersonal. On his end of things, Guattari generates the idea of "vectors of subjectification" that manifest a means to think through a conceptual model for annihilating the chimera of a non-interdependent sense of self, standing at the heart of environmental crises, both nineteenth-century and present. Guattari conceives that:

Vectors of subjectification do not necessarily pass through the individual, which in reality appears to be something like a ‘terminal’ for processes that involve human groups, socio-economic ensembles, data-processing machines, etc. Therefore, interiority establishes itself at the crossroads of multiple components, each relatively autonomous in relation to the other (3E 28).

Guattari suggests, by the term “vectors,” a subjective movement where the individual acts as a “terminal” in the sense of becoming both an inter-dependent and connected part of a broader network of processes. By igniting the individual’s interiority—the imagination within—Guattari makes possible the realization that one is necessarily the intersection of one’s self and the cultural and environmental fields. Within Guattari’s critical theory, environment, self, and society become an interconnecting flow.

The interplay of allegorical figures forming a trinitarian artistic constellation in Blake’s *Enoch* (Plate 1) achieves a Guattarian effect. The annihilated self of Enoch generates an orbit of visual art, music, and poetry. Identity becomes defined by interconnectivity, refusing divisions between discrete subjects. Indeed, the orthogonals between the allegorical figures can be seen as propogating Guattari’s idea of the “vectors of subjectification.” The illusion of the individual ruptures in Enoch and implicates the interplay of subjectivities that forms the crux of the lithograph, as it connects inspiration within the image to the viewer’s engagement that penetrates it. The verdant forms of the vines generate additional vectors in the lithograph inviting the viewer to look through an iconography of the natural environment heavenwards—towards a di/vine possibility of perception.

APPENDIX:

PLATES



Plate 1. William Blake, *Enoch*, 1806-1807. Lithograph Printed in Relief on Brown Wove Paper, 8.50 x 12.17 in. (21.59 x 30.91 cm.), Private Collection



Plate 2. Henry Fuseli, "Evening Thou Bringest All," 1803. Lithograph, 12.75 x 9.00 in. (32.39 x 22.86 cm.), from *The Specimens of Polyautography*, Published by Georg Jacob Vollweiler (London)



Plate 3. William Blake, *ALL RELIGIONS are ONE* ("Title Page", pl. 2), 1788. Relief etching, touched with pen, 2.04 x 5.20 x 3.60 cm.), Huntington Library, San Marino, CA



Plate 4. Blake, *Enoch*, 1806-1807. Lithograph (detail)

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