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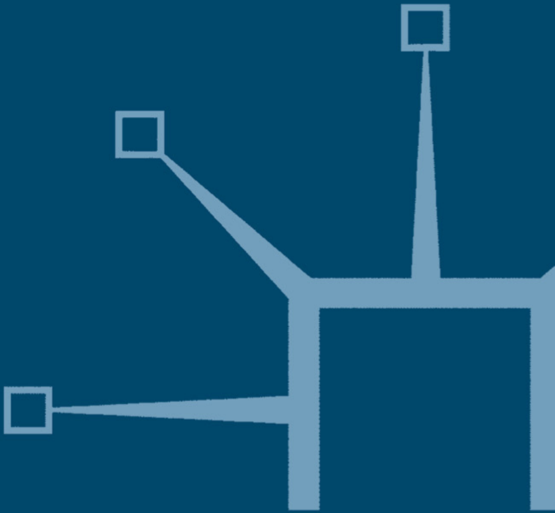
Blake 2.0

William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music and Culture

Edited by

Steve Clark, Tristanne Connolly and
Jason Whittaker



Blake 2.0

Selected Publications by Steve Clark

BLAKE IN THE NINETIES (ed. with David Worrall)
BLAKE, MODERNITY AND POPULAR CULTURE (ed. with Jason Whittaker)
BLAKE, NATION AND EMPIRE (ed. with David Worrall)
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LIBERATING MEDICINE 1720–1835 (ed. with Tristanne Connolly)

Selected Publications by Tristanne Connolly

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QUEER BLAKE (ed. with Helen P. Bruder)
SPECTACULAR DEATH: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Mortality and (Un)representability (ed.)
WILLIAM BLAKE AND THE BODY

Selected Publications by Jason Whittaker

BLAKE, MODERNITY AND POPULAR CULTURE (ed. with Steve Clark)
RADICAL BLAKE: Influence and Afterlife from 1827 (with Shirley Dent)
WILLIAM BLAKE AND THE MYTHS OF BRITAIN

Blake 2.0

William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music and Culture

Edited by

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List of Abbreviations

E   Erdman, David V., ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*

Note: all references to Blake's writing are taken from E.

All references to Blake's illuminated books and visual art, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the William Blake Archive.

MHH	*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
VDA	*Visions of the Daughters of Albion*
Am	*America a Prophecy*
Eur	*Europe a Prophecy*
SL	*The Song of Los*
BU	*The [First] Book of Urizen*
M	*Milton*
J	*Jerusalem*
FZ	*The Four Zoas*
DC	*A Descriptive Catalogue*
PA	*Public Address*
VLJ	*A Vision of the Last Judgement*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*

Blake 2.0: Introduction

Steve Clark, Tristanne Connolly, and Jason Whittaker

> Tho' I call them Mine I know they are not Mine
> (E701)

What precisely constitutes Blakean 'mineness'? Is it an act of identification or possession, or even, somewhat paradoxically, disavowal? As Galen Strawson has recently observed, the self may be conceived as a phenomenological mineness, but this bears little relation to traditional, metaphysical conceptions of selfhood. These are also difficult to reconcile with contemporary debate on the implications of technology, specifically digitalization, to which the title of this volume alludes. The dissemination of Blake's work across a wide variety of media across the twentieth century, and the possibilities raised by a new generation of more decentralized, interactive Web 2.0 software, create a variety of virtual selves for Blake, his works, and his audience, currently being explored, for example, via elements of the *Blake 2.0 Cloud*. Such selves, like Blake's Cloud in *The Book of Thel*, may 'vanish' and be 'seen no more', or 'pass away ... to tenfold life' (3:9–11, E5). The reinventions of twentieth-century Blake, as well as his ongoing regeneration within Web 2.0 media, require a more sustained examination of what this second life entails – Blake 2.0 alongside Blake 1.0.

Both as personality and artist, Blake seems to embody a powerful, even intransigent, individualism, whose aspiration to prophetic vision tends towards philosophical solipsism and cultural ostracism. Yet there is also Blake in the marketplace, in his time and ours, who may have had variable success in promoting himself, but nevertheless had lifelong involvement in the circulation, appropriation, and exchange of cultural commodities. There seems an inescapable contradiction between the desire to preserve the aura of the unique artwork (for instance, *Jerusalem* Copy E) and the dependence on a form of technology that inevitably tends to dispel it. Blake's own process combines the mechanical printing press with handwriting and drawing on the plate and hand-finishing on the print, and reproductions by others also combine facsimile and original work: the lithography of the

Yeats edition allowed for mass printing but required hand re-drawing of each image, and the Trianon facsimiles aspired to be close copies, yet, handmade with care, craft, and expensive materials, are unique works of art in themselves (and are treated by libraries as treasures). This tension between aura and technology can be traced throughout a long and complex reception history, through the Victorian period into modernism and beyond, but has been further accentuated over the past 10–15 years by the broader possibilities of digitalization and web dissemination. The traditional problematic of the relation of text and image may now be readily technically resolved, to a great extent, but in other ways it remains intransigent. In practical terms, the inclusion of images in books, though eased by digital reproduction, is still expensive and troublesome in terms of print and copyright costs. The William Blake Archive was established in the mid-1990s, with the aim of bringing encyclopaedic completion and democratic accessibility to Blake's work, allowing instant comparison of multiple versions previously dispersed among global institutions. However, its technology brings its own inconveniences, from Java-induced crashes to the clicking around necessary for navigation between plates, copies, and works. In formal terms, it is still rare to see integration of text and image as thorough as in Blake's composite art, as even graphic novels replicate comic book traditions of speech bubbles, narrative boxes, and set-off sound effects. Yet the combination of progress and impediment in reproducing Blake is dynamic, continually producing experiments with various methods of re-creation. Whatever improvements or bugs each method offers, Blake is not only increasingly reproducible, but Blake's work itself seems actively to entice processes of translation, mutation, proliferation into other media.

As Steve Clark and Masashi Suzuki point out in their introduction to *The Reception of Blake in the Orient*, until the beginning of this century, the 'focus of reception history had circled somewhat myopically around the problematic of Blake's contemporary audience (or lack thereof)' (2). Although a few articles on the subject of reception would occasionally appear in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, the most significant contributions were Deborah Dorfman's *Blake in the Nineteenth Century* (1969), still the best general guide to Blake's afterlife in the decades immediately after his death, and Robert Bertholf and Annette Levitt's *Blake and the Moderns* (1982), a collection of essays (including ones by Hazard Adams on Blake and Yeats and Robert Gleckner on Joyce) which has many insights into literary reception, although it has largely been superseded by Edward Larrissy's *Blake and Modern Literature* (2006). Larrissy's comprehensive overview of literary influences in the twentieth century was one of a number of books and essays that followed publication of Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker's wide-ranging and openly polemical *Radical Blake: Influence and Afterlife from 1827* (2002), a list that includes Jeremy Tambling's *Blake's Night Thoughts* (2005), which, although not devoted to Blake's reception, does include thoughtful sections on his influence on figures such as Blanchot and Thomas Mann; Steve Clark and Jason Whittaker's *Blake, Modernity and Popular Culture* (2007); some chapters of Helen Bruder's *Women Reading William Blake* (2007) that deal with subsequent audiences for Blake's texts as well as scholarly readings of Blake and his female contemporaries; and Roger Whitson and Donald Ault's *William Blake and Visual Culture*, a special edition of the journal *ImageTexT* that concentrated on the relationship between Blake and comic book art in particular. The Victorian and Edwardian contexts for the afterlife of Blake's art receive a wide-ranging account to match that of Larrissy in the literary field with the publication of Colin Trodd's *Visions of Blake: William Blake in the Art World, 1830–1930* (2011).

The central focus of the earlier collection, *Blake, Modernity, and Popular Culture*, lay in the period between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries containing both modernism as elite cultural formation and modernization as technological innovations producing mass culture. The post-modernity succeeding that was still primarily literary and text-based, though with some attention to the graphic artist Alan Moore and film-maker Derek Jarman. *Blake 2.0* has a different starting point. What happens if the Blakean afterlife is detached from writer-on-writer models of influence and residually patrilineal concepts of inheritance and transmission? If one chooses to bypass the usual editorial-critical genealogy (the Gilchrists, Swinburne, the Rossettis, Yeats and Ellis, Sampson, Keynes, Damon, Percival, Frye, Erdman), the mapping of the terrain is immediately strikingly different when done via curatorial practice in exhibitions, the iconic fashioning of centenary biography, and the nuanced aestheticism of more specialist art scholarship. In place of an exclusively masculine tradition, Blake becomes common ground between the progressive centre-right commitments of Mona Wilson, and the homintern connoisseurship of Antony Blunt. That Blunt's memoir, begun after his exposure as a Communist spy, has recently become available for consultation after being withheld from the public for twenty-five years (see Hadley) promises to reveal further political and social nuances to Blake's twentieth-century circulation. In this collection, it is hoped that by bracketing questions of infra-literary relationships (though themselves of legitimate fascination), alternative models of influence may emerge that are less defined and confined by various forms of affiliation or resistance, and more responsive to the diverse and unpredictable process of translation into a wide variety of alternative media (not simply graphic and pictorial, but musical, sculptural, digital). On a simple empirical level, there seems much less personal investment necessary: Blake's work is fit for purpose (*'d***d good to steal from'*, as Fuseli said (Bentley, *Stranger* 106)) regardless of the degree of intense inwardness that has traditionally marked classic studies of literary allusion, whether in Eliot, Bloom, or Ricks. The lack of interest in reception studies in Blake scholarship until comparatively recently may be accounted for by its continuous effort to rebut

Eliot's charge of the lack of 'a framework of accepted and traditional ideas' (*Selected Essays* 279). In the wake of retrieval of multiple possible contexts, intellectual, religious, literary, philosophical, political, one might wonder 'Enough! or Too much' (E38); these genealogical endeavours have usually involved rather traditional kinds of philological models of source, indebtedness, and transmission. There has been much less interest in where Blake might be going, in his stature as authority figure in his own right rather than perennial marginalized outsider, and the new kinds of aesthetic and ethical reciprocity that might evolve out of the encounter with his works as explored, for example, in Sarah Haggarty's *Blake's Gifts: Poetry and the Politics of Exchange* (2010).

A particular interest of this collection, which corresponds with its move away from a focus on literary reception, is the transformation of Blake's work through different media. Following Bruno Latour and Michel Callon in distinguishing between intermediaries, which transmit forces through a network with negligible interference, and mediators, which multiply difference, *Blake 2.0* will present a radical challenge to reception studies that assume the pre-existence of a particular social phenomenon, that William Blake's authority can be transmitted to later generations. Rather, such authority comes into being when it is invoked by subsequent artists, filmmakers, and musicians: it is the constant mediation, the translation of Blake, that gives him his force. Attempts to reinforce simpler models of communication whereby the power of the author is transmitted to passive recipients, as can be seen in the work of the Blake Archive, for example, invariably mediate a particular force while trying – and failing – to suppress other articulations. Whereas the Blake Archive results in the rather narrow focus of comparison of individual plates, other nodes on the network of transmission activate Blake in music, sculpture, film, graphic novels, and digital animations. The explosion of digital media in the past two decades (the exploration of which, in relation to reception, is an important part of *Blake 2.0*) emphasizes the heterogeneous locations where agency can occur across a network, but as this book demonstrates, that network of Blake reception and mediation has been exceptionally creative throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Mark Lussier begins the first section, on 'Blakean Circulations' by taking Blake's *Milton* as a model for literary reception. As an alternative to Bloom's Freudian model of Oedipal struggle in *The Anxiety of Influence*, Lussier turns to reader response theory and develops it in a Lacanian direction, particularly through considering the way Blake's mirror writing attempts to produce a change in the psyche of readers. The idea that literary reception produces textual 'wormholes' leads Lussier to explore the ways a reader could make a quantum leap from a Blakean text to a book about the New Physics or a science fiction novel, concluding with a look at Blake's appearances in J.G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock. The counter-cultural contexts which led these two writers to dabble in Blake are explored by Peter Otto from a different angle, via one of the chief apologists for the counter culture, Theodore Roszak who, Otto argues, gives the impression he is as much 'possessed' by Blake as Allen Ginsberg who claimed, 'the voice of Blake … is the voice I have now' ('Notes' 28). Otto's analysis teases out the complex relations of reason and imagination, modernity and anti-modernity; these inhere even in the oppositional formulations of the counter culture which eventually contribute to support the mainstream, consumerist culture they were designed to oppose. Likewise, he unravels the origin and character of the Blake who is both received and appropriated here, his politics and spirituality appealed to in support of a late twentieth-century shamanism that has helped shape movements such as New Age philosophy and tantric sexuality, as well as deep ecology. Each of these opening chapters offers examples of the mental conflict that occurs in Blakean appropriations, with the dissemination of Blake in scientific writings as discussed by Lussier standing in marked contrast to Roszak's anti-scientism.

Taking up the new media implications of *Blake 2.0*, Roger Whitson considers Blake's virtual presence. He gives interpretations of selected instances: Marcondes's short film, *Tyger*, Guynup, Broglio, and Tulis's installation, *Virtual Crystal Cabinet*, and Joel Priddy's digital comic, 'Mr. Blake's Company'. In the light of the interactive potential of Web 2.0, Whitson offers a critique of the seeming monumentality of the Blake Archive. He uses the idea of network materiality to put forward potential new ways of seeing textuality as dynamically tied to all the elements (including technology) that form and influence it, and to move beyond projects unnecessarily blinkered by traditional methodologies (typified by Dave Parry as 'tag[ging] up Milton' ('Be Online')). Whitson gives us a behind-the-scenes look at such potential through his reflections and projections on *The Blake 2.0 Cloud* project he co-edits with Jason Whittaker. Like Whitson, Shirley Dent takes on the Blake Archive, but connects the past and present of reception by considering Blake's work – in its appearances from Victorian editions to twenty-first-century cereal packets – in relation to copyright. She uses Blake as a test case for wrangling with the dilemma of intellectual property, torn between free availability and apparent authenticity. In the case of the Blake Archive, Dent analyses the paradoxes of its stance on copyright as an openly accessible website displaying museum treasures. As a contrast, the chapter gives a detailed résumé of the reinventions of Blake's texts by the Pre-Raphaelites, where copyright seems less a 'licence to publish' than a 'licence to create', and (alongside contemporary criticisms of such editorial freedom with the text) ponders the implications of this instance of copyright not protecting textual integrity but rather distributing the group's proprietary version of 'our Blake'.

If we wonder, with Angus Whitehead, who 'our Blake' would have been to the important but neglected twentieth-century biographer Mona Wilson, we get quite a different picture. Unlike Roszak with his counter-culture Blake, Wilson, attached to but at odds with the Bloomsbury circle, evokes Blake from a retired country cottage rather than the cutting edge of the avant-garde. Whitehead traces her remarkable life as the highest paid female civil servant in Britain, her close association with the Tory historian G.M. Young, and her social activism on behalf of women, which had a curiously conservative quality, reflected in her treatment of Catherine Blake for whom she expresses sympathy yet also an anxiety to portray her in her proper place as an inferior helpmeet. Whitehead draws attention to the unsurpassed research in Wilson's biography, while calling for it to be built upon to fill the enduring need for a definitive Blake biography, the strange result being that an early twentieth-century volume remains the standard reference work in very many respects despite a plethora of recent attempts.

Part II, on Blake's reception in visual art, commences with a continuation of Dent's and Whitehead's attention to constructions of Blake by his editors and critics. Colin Trodd traces mid-twentieth-century attempts to write Blake into, or out of, a tradition of masterliness in art, and to figure out how to respond to his idiosyncratic work in some kind of relation to art history and evaluative systems. Throughout the twentieth century, art historical approaches to Blake have tended to remain separate from more mainstream exegesis of the poetry, and Trodd maps some of these art histories on a tripartite division between the stadial model, where the masterly artist is fitted to his historical stage in the 'true' narrative of how the meaning and value of art have developed; the romantic model, where the individual and inimitable artist battles with what the stadial model celebrates; and the dynastic model, where the masterly artwork contains signs of its relation to other great works, forming a secret tradition obscured by the other two models. Trodd looks closely at a spectrum of critics who struggle with what is seen as Blake's vulgarity and intractable individualism, such as Alan Clutton-Brock (who was also a mystery writer and seems to have seen Blake as a shifty character who 'lived within the recesses of his mind' (*Blake* 9)). While Herbert Read epitomizes the romantic model Blake of spontaneous and sensuous perception, Anthony Blunt reconciles Blake with the stadial model by turning into a strength his unique relation to the forms available in traditionally valued art. Trodd intriguingly suggests that Blake is less the object of Blunt's criticism than a witness, an excuse for self-description of Blunt's own vast visual knowledge.

Mei-Ying Sung then looks at Blake's influence on practising artists in the context of Surrealism. She makes resonant connections between Blake and automatic writing, not only as 'vision' but also through the fact that André Breton's co-writer of the first such Surrealist text *Les Champs Magnétique*, Philippe Soupault, wrote a book about Blake and translated the *Songs*. She analyses Max Ernst's cutting and pasting (and reversing) of images from Blake's *Grave* designs in his graphic novel *La femme 100 têtes*. Herbert Read appears again in another setting, as Sung shows Blake's numinous presence among the English Surrealists (such as Paul Nash and Cecil Collins), centring on the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition, in which Ruthven Todd was also instrumental. Sung then traces the collaborative printmaking experiments by Joan Miró and Stanley William Hayter along with Todd, and their continued influence in recent heated controversy on Blake's colour printing technique, showing that Surrealism is an integral influence on Blake criticism, as well as Blake an integral influence on Surrealism.

Contemporary sculptors are the focus of Mark Crosby's essay; sculpture being an art form that was not particularly associated with Blake until the late twentieth century, despite his long friendship with John Flaxman. Crosby begins by emphasizing the links this friendship provided, before selecting a series of artists to discuss: first, Alistair Noble, whose installation *Illuminated Blake* reinvents the book as a sculpture of steel and light; then Helen Martins, whose renderings of Adam and Eve in cement and wire, like Blake's biblical watercolours, are a visual version of 'rewritten Bible' that reinterpret gender and eroticism in the scene of temptation and fall. Clearly, no discussion of Blake and sculpture could omit Eduardo Paolozzi; Crosby analyses his monumental *Newton* as 'a three-dimensional machine-man occupying a metamorphic area between the mimetic and the monstrous'. Yet there are also Antony Gormley's solipsistic self-sculptures which can be read in terms of Blakean self-annihilation.

Philippa Simpson takes Blake's art out of the gallery in a chapter on Blake and art therapy. Placing Blake in such an environment makes way for reflection on the idea of the artist's madness, and Simpson pursues a supplement to the predominant Freudian and Jungian interpretations on the basis of his presence in the Rudolph Steiner community, such as a nursing home that bears Blake's name. Her field research at William Blake House reveals an ambivalent relationship to the namesake: will that moniker inspire or be irrelevant to the workers, attract or put off potential patients? Simpson uses the opportunity to ponder art as practice and as cure, returning via a different route to Trodd's territory of aesthetic value, and Blake's place as an insider or outsider who brings with him the credibility of high art or affirmation for 'primitive' expression.

Expanding to wider realms of visual creativity in Part III, two chapters look at Blake on film. Susan Matthews connects film and painting as she reads Joyce Cary's 1944 novel, and Ronald Neame's 1958 film, *The Horse's Mouth*, side by side. What emerges is a fascinatingly complex role for the artist in twentieth-century British society: an oppositional stance becomes necessary for artistic identity and integrity, and thus ironically necessary for mainstream success. Blake's own position is comparable, again as insider or outsider in his own context (for example, his relations with the Royal Academy). Matthews compares Cary's and Blake's respective positions on art's relation to politics, and grounds the connection by reference to the high profile of the Keynes brothers (John Maynard Keynes founding the

Arts Council after the Second World War) and the Communist sympathies of their circle (including Anthony Blunt and Jacob Bronowski). In the end, through the generic placement of Cary's artist among the conventions of an Ealing comedy, class divisions are transcended in grassroots resistance to state authority. But keeping the novel (as well as twenty-first-century British politics) in mind underscores how such comic optimism, with its re-routeing of opposition to serve the mainstream, only 'offers to salve the inequalities', then or now.

Also with an eye to the significance of genre, Mark Douglas examines what kind of gunslinging (anti)hero 'William Blake' makes, as an accountant on the run from the town of Machine, played by Johnny Depp, in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*. This is part of a larger discussion of the strategies of the revisionist western in light of the revolutionary and colonial issues which were important to the 'original' English poet. The evocation of Blake's name has a role in alternative American cinema, but a closer look at quotations from *The Book of Thel* in Hal Hartley's *The New Math(s)* and another antihero Blake in Gus Van Sant's *Last Days* reveals that it is not mere name-dropping. Both films dramatize the spiritual destruction that is caused when the state, or one's own despair, closes down the inlets of perception; both conjure Blake to suggest that regeneration might always be there if we could only open ourselves to it.

A reader's confrontation with a text is an opportunity for altered perception, as Lussier argues; Matthew J.A. Green writes about the role the combined visual and textual manipulations of the graphic novel can play in such enlightenment. While a good deal has been written about Blake's composite art and the broader relations of image and text (recently, for example, in Luisa Calè's *Fuseli's Milton Gallery: Turning Readers into Spectators* (2006)), Green fills a crucial gap: structural comparison between illuminated book and comic book is generally neglected, despite the obvious parallels. Harnessing the insights of Comics Studies to his purpose, Green sheds light not only on the influence of Blake on Alan Moore, but offers revelations of his own on how the composition of the elements on the page produce transformative perceptive experiences. These discoveries are broadly applicable to comics and to Blake's illuminations, but Green also gives a close comparison of Blake's *Song of Los* and Moore's *Promethea* to show how both artists, by transgressing the borders of speech bubbles and frames, also free themselves from the limitations of genre, and work to efface the division between imaginative works and the material world.

To open Part IV on Blake in Music, Keri Davies gives a rich overview of those musicians who have composed settings of Blake's verse. Commencing with thoughts on Blake's own melodies for his various 'Songs', and the desire that they might somehow be recovered, Davies proceeds with a synopsis of what others have done with his words, covering an impressive range of genres from classical to electronic, folk to metal. (He also creates a detailed catalogue of these works in an appendix.) Davies shares both factual knowledge and aesthetic responsiveness to express the character of these tracks vividly in print, and places them in the oeuvre of the particular musician while mapping a wider musical landscape. He then chooses some remarkable settings to analyse in depth, with special focus on Benjamin Britten, and, of course, the 'Jerusalem' hymn with astute comparison of the Parry and Elgar arrangements and the political as well as musical significance of their different styles.

Steve Clark and James Keery take on rock's most literary, and most explicated, songwriter, Bob Dylan. The more obvious links between Dylan and Blake (such as the assumption that the song 'Every Grain of Sand' picks up only on Blake's famous 'Auguries' quatrain and goes no further) for Clark and Keery show that an 'innocent' relation between the two writers does not cover the richness of their dialogue. Along with a commanding view of the broad and complex echoes of Blake in Dylan, and their further resonances in twentieth-century art and culture, Clark and Keery offer inspired close readings of three songs from Dylan's powerful mid-1960s trilogy of albums, and arrange them as contraries. 'Mr. Tambourine Man' is read as a Song of Innocence, 'Like a Rolling Stone' as a Song of Experience, and 'Visions of Johanna' as a progression to an apocalyptic vision of Gehenna, and perhaps of self-regeneration. Along the way, we meet many Blakes and many Dylans, the cowboy and the outlaw, the joker and the prophet, the ruthless cynic and the seeker in the 'ruins of time' for the 'mansions of eternity' (Dylan, *Lyrics* 153; E705).

Tristanne Connolly explores the relationship between Blake and Jim Morrison via their common obsession with Oedipus. The way Morrison relates to his predecessors compares in some ways to Bloom's scenario of *agon* – his words are sometimes mistaken for Blake's, or Huxley's – but suggests different models: instead of an anxiety of influence, there is an uninhibited possession through intoxication and vision, and a performative Oedipalism which replaces struggle for a unified identity with a free range of role play. As Blake pictures Milton entering him in the form of a falling star, Morrison envisions his body becoming inhabited by the souls of 'Indians scattered on dawn's highway bleeding' ('Dawn's Highway', *An American Prayer*). This connects with Otto's discussion of Blake and twentieth-century shamanism in the counter culture: Blake's Orc and Morrison's Lizard King also take on spiritual power through animal forms. Connolly concludes the comparison with a consideration of another shared obsession of the two poets: giant snakes. Blake's treatment of male nudes, and Morrison's legendary attempts to whip it out onstage in Miami, both mock any inflated importance of the male genitals, and in their teasing raise the question of which is more shocking, the 'real thing' or the absent phallus.

For David Fallon, Morrison is the godfather of alternative rock Blake, and he follows the legacy through several different inheritors. Nick Cave creates a dark Song of Innocence *and* Experience in a ballad about a murderous lunatic child and her existential insights into bleak small town life. Julian Cope, the 'arch-drude', picks up on Blake's northern mythology to create his own revisionary religion, a postmodern cult of Odin, although with a somewhat different estimation of the eternal female. Cope has a committed relation to Blake's prophetic vision, taking up the mantle in terms of his own conception of the artist's social role, and the responsibility to exert spiritual resistance against conformity and repression. Pete Doherty and Carl Barât, in The Libertines and their subsequent projects, are most interested in Blake as a Londoner, and build on his sense of local geography. For Billy Bragg, too, Blake is a guide in 'looking for a new England', as he creates a 'socialism of the heart' by envisioning protestors by the highway as angels in the trees.

A darker interpretation of the role of Blakean music in English politics is offered by the final chapter in this collection, in which Jason Whittaker considers the uses and abuses of the hymn 'Jerusalem' in the past thirty years. After a relative lull during the 1960s and 1970s, where the hymn became little more than a kitsch throwback to embarrassed memories of failed imperialism (or equally strained socialism), after the rise of Thatcherism and then New Labour, it became increasingly important to political movements on the far left and the far right. Whittaker explores how the relatively mainstream positions of neoliberalism and social democracy were replaced by more extremist positions as 'Jerusalem' was adopted first by anarchists and then by the British National Party.

In the opening years of the twenty-first century, *Blake 2.0* ends with the paradox of how the 'Second Life' of Blake's texts and art very often has very little to do with the original aims, ambitions, and intentions of William Blake, whatever those may have been. Blakean mineness, transmitted through different media, aesthetic and philosophical contexts, and political movements, is transmuted into a sometimes strange, sometimes frightening, always fascinating Blakean otherness that promises to continue to proliferate in many other forms.

Part I

Blakean Circulations

1

Mirrored Text/Infinite Planes: Reception Aesthetics in Blake's *Milton*

Mark Lussier

I 'Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation' (*M* 2:25, E96)

William Blake's illuminated prophecy, *Milton*, invites a wide range of methodological approaches: artistic conception, biblical connections, mythic construction, narrative progressions, subject formation, textual production, visual representations.[1] In this chapter I wish to return to the central issue of the poem itself – the transmission of poetic and intellectual inheritance – by exploring the wide spectrum of possible reception and response dynamics. My aspiration here is to move beyond a simple summation of past positions (Bloom, Easson, Mitchell) to achieve a higher synthesis on a more energetic plane of critical reception where 'understanding, interpretation and application [meet]' (Jauss 143). The difference between 'reception' and 'response' is a complicated one and reflects a broad cultural versus a more personal interaction with a text. Indeed, in his brief preface to *Reception Theory*, Robert C. Holub acknowledges the inherent difficulties in clearly separating these terms: 'Nonetheless, the most frequent suggestion has been to view *Rezeption* as related to the reader, while *Wirking* is supposed to pertain to textual aspects – an arrangement that is not entirely satisfactory by any account' (xi). In the current case of *Milton*, Blake seems to work in both dimensions, with his printing technique employing a textual dynamic (mirrored writing) designed to highlight the necessity of active readership, while the thematic concerns relate to his own reception and response to the dead poet John Milton and his works. The discursive fields taken as exemplary of this process of assimilation and re-creation will be those of science fiction and scientific writing, despite the long association of Blake with anti-scientism and a flight from reason.[2] The chapter thus begins with Blake's dramatization of his own response to Milton, and concludes with the activation of response in a future, and unexpectedly hospitable, audience.

In terms of plot, theme, and symbolism, Blake unambiguously posits as the work's immediate genesis his own reception of John Milton's works, his varied aesthetic responses to his powerful prophetic predecessor, and his creative clashes with his patron William Hayley, a Miltonist, who was reading Blake's work (that is, passages of *Milton*) during his residence in Felpham (Wittreich 229–36). These biographical, historical, and literary dimensions of the poem, while providing three planes of reception, have already received considerable critical attention, and my concerns are more immediately clustered around the layered representations of the mental event of reception, as when Milton is perceived in 'the Sea of Time & Space':

> Then first I saw him in the Zenith as a falling star,
> Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift;
> And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enterd there:
> But from my left foot a black cloud redounding spread over Europe
>
> (*M* 15:47–50, E110)

This first description of the descent, in all senses of the term, would involve the prior poet's reception, a two-way movement from the world to the mind (the Blakean realm of Eternity) and the counter-movement from Blake's own mind into the material world (the Blakean realm of Generation), with Milton established as immediate predecessor of Blake's prophetic lineage. This would be a mode of 'reception', but the next description of Milton's descent, which occurs six plates later, governs what I view as 'response':

> But Milton entering my Foot; I saw in the nether
> Regions of the Imagination; also all men on Earth
> And all in Heaven, saw in the nether regions of Imagination
> In Ulro beneath Beulah, the vast breach of Milton's descent
>
> (*M* 21:4–7, E115)

The last description achieves a slightly different affect, connecting the transmigration of and penetration by 'Milton' to the opening of individual and collective imagination. This verbal event receives visual treatment as a small-scale interlinear flourish immediately above the first narration, yet also receives expansive treatment as a full-plate (yet nonetheless mirror-image) representation after the second narration, with the latter image (plate 29) concluding 'Part the First' (literally the last thing seen before the encounter with mirrored writing on the next plate).

In terms of its narrative construction, *Milton* has also long been seen as a radical departure from the prior historically and psychologically oriented illuminated prophecies of the Lambeth period, although the work does operate within the ever-evolving aspects of Blake's mythic treatment of history and historical treatment of myth. However, unlike prior prophetic works, the poet here becomes 'a part of the vision', serving both 'as an actor and a spectator' from his 'local habitation' and, from this location, unveiling 'a new dimension of vastness' that opens onto 'the "reality" that we recognize as this earth' (Howard 11–12).[3] For John Howard, this new presence 'forces us to see how his poetry reflects psychological meanings' (12), but while this has become the mainstream view of the illuminated books, 'this priority ... accorded the psychological dimension' has been challenged and found 'incomplete' (Bracher, *Being Form'd* xiii).

In terms of its 'dramatic' structure, *Milton* relentlessly deploys reception dynamics as the background for the work's 'exploration of the limits of poetry as a force for inciting people to imaginative action' (Mitchell, 'Radical Comedy' 282) and thereby effectively establishes 'the reader' as the location from which to 'contemplate' the text's narrative of reception at ever-proliferating layers of meaning and construction. The two planes of intensive reception that open the work further connect poetic events to the historical plane. The 'Preface' to *Milton*, which directly addresses readers, identifies faulty reception of the Classical tradition as the artistic and inspirational malady of the age and articulates an impassioned plea for aesthetic revolution against this dominant textual tradition through adoption of 'the Sublime of the Bible' (E95) as 'The Great Code of Art' (E274): 'Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age! Set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings ... who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War' (E95). Such direct addresses have always drawn the attention of reader-response criticism, and Blake asserts that aesthetic choices have political implications.[4] The opening narrative segment, the Bard's Song, connects the prefatory plea for outer revolution (in history) to the inner pursuit of evolution in poetic narrative (through prophecy) but in symbolic rather than analytic language. These dimensions have long been connected by those who study biblical structures and allusions in Blake's works, and most scholars across the critical spectrum would endorse James Reiger's view that 'The Bard's Song, then, is a prophet's account of the fall of prophecy itself' (271).[5] The song provides an additional layer of reception symbolism, with Milton receiving the song of the Bard to open a work concerned with Milton's reception by the individual author of the work and within history, evincing in the process considerable anxiety about influence in both locations.

The dramatization of 'the dynamics of literary response' (Holland, *Dynamics* v), as both the 'preface' and the Bard's Song suggest, occurs with an almost obsessive intensity throughout the work, and Blake critic *cum* master theorist Harold Bloom fashioned the anxieties about individual and collective reception into the critical conception with which he is most often associated, 'the anxiety of influence' (*Anxiety* 5–18). Of course, *Milton* provides an exemplary (if not *the* exemplary) case for his theory of poetic revisionism:

> The struggle is clearly an internal one, between those qualities in Blake that would compel him to surrender his prophetic function, and

> everything in him that desires to follow Milton's heroic dedication as a poet ... He wants to be an incarnation of the Poetical Character, as Milton was before him, and for this he needs Milton's aid, or rather the aid of what was most radical and imaginative in Milton.
>
> (E909)

Bloom's model, founded upon 'misprision' as the ethos of reception that clears space for a poet relative to a powerful predecessor, bridges the psychological and receptive dimensions discussed previously through Howard and Bracher. Bloom's model also provides a framework within which to read other planes discussed above, whether a direct address to readers, an encoded song of and for bards (past, present, and future), a symbolic valorization of biblical tradition, or even a patron's response to Blake's reception and transmutation of Milton's works in *Milton*. These are all indisputable dimensions of reception crafted into the narrative of the work, and having acknowledged them, I will shift to other concerns tied intimately to the physical conditions that define the fundamental dimensions of textual effects, seeking to unveil what might be termed Blake's affective mechanics of textuality, and his attempt to deploy, through *Milton*, an activated form of reception aesthetics at the event-horizon of the poem's neuro-textual (and therefore psycho-mechanical) manipulations.

II The affective mechanics of Blakean textuality

Hans Robert Jauss, the hermeneutic heart of the Constance School, argued that 'The poetic text can be disclosed in its aesthetic function when the poetic structures [and operations] ... are retranslated, from out of the objectification of the description, back into the process of the experience of the text that allows the reader to take part in the genesis of the aesthetic object' (141). Jauss's use of the distinction between *Wirking* and *Rezeption* stands in contrast to the Freudian Oedipal model employed by Bloom, to which this essay will later return in order to develop the insights of both reception theorists from a Lacanian perspective. The discrete material features at work in the textuality of *Milton* operate, I argue, more expansively than Jauss imagined, and assume, somewhat, the shape of an 'active text' opening onto both 'a physical outside and a psychological inside' (Holland, *Critical* 114). However, even Norman Holland's description falls short of mapping the interactive fields of force from which *Milton* is woven, perhaps because he believed that 'psychoanalytic meaning underlies all the others' (*Dynamics* 27). I remain convinced that the very material body of the poem in question forces an intermingling or entanglement of physicality and mentality, thereby refuting, in advance, the position articulated by Jauss's Constance colleague Wolfgang Iser, who dismissed 'the very idea of literary texts [capable of] changing the psyche of readers' (42).

Not surprisingly, Blake Studies established long ago the ability of illuminated works to produce such affective alterations, which I argue occurs through a fusion of literary stylistics, visual mimetics and printing mechanics. Roger R. Easson's analysis of *Jerusalem*, an essay easily overlooked among the critical giants occupying the collection *Blake's Sublime Allegory*, concludes that the visual and verbal fields unite in an attempt to restore 'the fallen reader to a new and expanded vision' (327), and my initial efforts in this direction were forged relative to the Blake-Milton critic Joseph A. Wittreich's powerful reading of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which pursues 'the formation of the prophetic character' (189), and of *Milton*, which proposes 'that the whole destiny of man is threatened by one erring poet' (232). Mark Bracher's description of the capacity of illuminated works to 'produce [through interpellation] significant transformations in a reader's psychic economy' ('Rouzing' 183) also shapes one plane of my own vision of a dynamic text with a gaze of its own. And so, while *The Marriage* and *Jerusalem* offer intriguing possibilities for exploring the hermeneutic dimensions of reception aesthetics built into the illuminated prophecies, *Milton* actually provides an exemplary form within which to examine their operations at numerous (dare I follow the text's lead and say 'infinite') layers.

V.A. De Luca has well analysed the textual operations of 'Blake's infinite [as] the text before us and its potentialities' (240), and the late illuminated works in particular achieve a 'sublime' textual state that shatters 'the barriers between you and it' (Poulet 42).[6] From such explosive encounters, 'infinite' planes of response emerge to provide the only viable vehicle for the text to realize its clearly stated aims and ends (as the citation of Numbers after 'Jerusalem' indicates, Blake seeks to create a nation of prophets through the agency of the imagination). This work manifests as its fugue state a dynamic and interactive onto-teleological object operating within the subject, rendering this work a good candidate for what I have elsewhere described as a quantum text whose affective mechanics would give rise, by design, to the 'quantum poetics' discussed by Jerome McGann (*Radiant Textuality* 161–6 and 228–31). I also argue that any critical observation of the finite text produces infinite readings, resulting in a 'many-worlds theory' of the engagement with and exchange between the objective planes of the Blakean text and 'the subjective experience[s] of the life-world' (Jauss 143).[7] Textual planes establish patterns of interference and identification that support the claim for a textuality both defining and representing the events of the poem and reflecting recent philosophical analysis of the very entanglements between mind and matter as the foundation of all 'events' (textual and otherwise).

Dedicated readers of Blake's illuminated works have encountered, and quite quickly come to share with Paul De Man, the sense 'that hermeneutics and poetics, different and distinct as they are, have a way of becoming entangled' (x), since the painter/poet/printer/prophet thrusts them into one of the more demanding textual fields in English literary history. The primary