

THE AESTHETICS OF BLAKE'S DRAWING AND ENGRAVING

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PREFACE

The foundation of Blake's aesthetics is the engraver's virtue of clear, distinct outline. The perception of form, character, art, and morality depends upon the determinate outline. Blake's criticism of art and literature is founded on the principle of clear outline. What is good in art is clearly and distinctly formed; what is bad in art obscures form or outline. Since there are no lines in nature, the emphasis must go to the imagination where ideal forms (i. e., outlines) exist eternally. Because nature is mortal and continually perishing, just as the mortal (corporeal, vegetable) eye, then the mental and eternal eye of imagination should concentrate on visions of eternity. Blake's aesthetic theory consistently develops from outline to perception to visions of eternal things.

Blake's aesthetics are medieval in the sense that there is no attempt to reproduce nature; what is in the mind's eye is all that matters. Figures and landscape are ideological and symbolic rather than mirrors of nature. Perception of the infinite in the Middle Ages was a matter of the future and Judgement Day. For Blake, apocalyptic vision is ever-present.

Blake's minor aesthetic criteria dictate that drapery should reveal form rather than cover it. Hands and feet should be drawn with particular care. Drawing from life is distasteful since it is

the work of the perishing eye. Dürer and Michelangelo are admired uncritically. The Gothic is the only true style in art; here Blake understands the Gothic to mean both the Romanesque and Gothic works of Westminster Abbey. He makes no clear distinction.

Color appeals directly to the senses; the appeal of line is more abstract, more purely intellectual than color. When Blake's color is considered, two major problems present themselves; first, it is impossible to know which works Blake tinted; second, adequate consideration of Blake's color would demand the examination of all extant copies. Even so, owing to the emotional impact of color, conclusions are likely to be too general or subjective to have much meaning. Judging by Blake's own statements, the use of line in drawing and engraving form the primary foundation of his aesthetic theory. Hence, this paper is concerned primarily with the theory derived from drawing and engraving.

ABSTRACT

Blake combines both poet and painter. Following the early recognition of this fact by Joseph Wicksteed, and the recent work done by Geoffrey Keynes, Anthony Blunt, and Jean Hagstrum, there is an attempt here to show that the aesthetics of the draftsman-engraver influence the poet. The poet cannot be understood without the aesthetics of the draftsman-engraver.

OUTLINE

- I. Blake's Gothic line
 - A. Blake's studies at Westminster Abbey
 - B. Gothic symmetry, formality, and proportions
 - C. Medieval and Renaissance aesthetics
 - D. Blake and landscape
 - E. Blake's drawing from life
 - F. Some minor points
- II. The Aesthetics of Blake's Chalcography
 - A. The clear outline presumed by engraving
 - B. The doctrine of particulars
 - C. The Line of Beauty
 - D. Illuminated printing
- III. Some Minor Considerations
 - A. Fresco confused with watercolor
 - B. The experimental pictures
- IV. Raphael versus Rubens: A Classic Aesthetic Argument
 - A. Line versus color
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 - D. Art, History, and Empire--An Entangled Logic
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CHAPTER I

BLAKE'S GOTHIC LINE

Throughout his life Blake maintains that Gothic art is the art of vision and inspiration. His apprenticeship sets the ground upon which his aesthetic theory is founded. During this period he is to read Winckelmann, study engravings after Michelangelo and adapt some of their ideas in his own practice. Blake's master, James Basire, sent him to Westminster Abbey to make copies of the monuments there. Intuitively, Blake is to adopt an essentially medieval point-of-view.

Blake is known to have made copies of the Westminster monuments of Henry III, Queen Elinor, Queen Phillipa, Edward III, Richard II and his Queen, and Aymer de Valence. According to Malkin they are "among his first studies."¹ An engraving of Edward III which can be attributed with certainty to Blake,² compared with a photograph of the monument,³ reveals a careful and gifted hand.

Blake makes no distinction between the Romanesque and Gothic art of the Abbey. Both are called Gothic by Blake. The Romanesque

¹ Arthur Symons, William Blake (London, 1907), p. 313.

² Geoffrey Keynes, Blake Studies (London, 1949), p. 42.

³ Lawrence Tanner, The History and Treasures of Westminster Abbey (London, 1953), p. 45.

monuments are characterized by their formality and symmetry of attitude. The countenances of Henry III, Edward III, and Richard II are studies in symmetry. The left eye is like the right. Wrinkles around the mouth and on the forehead form symmetrical patterns. Folds of costume on the left symmetrically repeat themselves on the right. Attitudes, whether sitting, standing, or lying are symmetrically repetitive. The formality of these monuments assumes an austerity that Blake incorporated in his own compositions.

Blake's choice of proportion is Gothic (that is, Romanesque-Gothic of the Abbey). Head- or face-length measure is not used at all.

Here the figure is no longer "measured" at all, not even according to head- or face-lengths; the schema almost completely renounced, so to speak, the object. The system of lines--often conceived from a purely ornamental point of view and at times quite comparable to the shapes of Gothic tracery--is superimposed upon the human form like an independent wire framework.⁴

The shape of the space to be filled by the human form determines the proportion of that figure. The Renaissance theory of human proportions imposes no restrictions⁵ on Blake's drawing and the natural structure

⁴ Erwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts (Garden City, 1955), p. 83.

⁵ Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, The Craftsman's Handbook (New York, 1933), p. 49.

Leonardo da Vinci, The Notebooks (New York, 1954), p. 205.

Albrecht Dürer, The Writings of Albrecht Dürer (New York, 1958), p. 234.

Robert Clements, Michelangelo's Theory of Art (New York, 1961), p. 155.

of the organism is ignored. The resulting distortions are characteristic of Blake's Gothic line. The ornamental details of the Abbey are sufficient to have impressed these conceptions on the young visionary apprentice.

Indirectly and intuitively, then, Blake adopts medieval aesthetics. What Panofsky says of the medieval painter might just as well be said of Blake: "Master Eckhart's painter paints a rose, as Dante draws the figure of an angel, not 'from life' but from the 'image in his soul'."⁶ Visible objects become symbols and not ends in themselves.

And in exceptional cases in which the procedure of the imitative arts was considered with regard to their relation to a visible model, this model was conceived, not as a natural object but as an 'exemplar' or 'simile'--that is, as another work of art which served as a pattern.⁷

Blake is to project his intuitive grasp of medieval aesthetics into a general view of reality.⁸

Renaissance aesthetics only superficially touched Blake. The principal aesthetic view beginning with the Renaissance has been the dogma that art is a direct and faithful representation of a

⁶ Erwin Panofsky, The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer (Princeton, 1955), p. 243.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hazard Adams, "The Blakean Aesthetic," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XIII (1954), 233-248.

natural object. Blake is herein at odds with his professed master Dürer. "And thou must know," writes Dürer, "the more accurately one approaches nature by way of imitation, the better and more artistic thy work becomes."⁹ Hamlet advises the players "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature." (III. ii. 22-23.)

Imitative representation invites comparison with the real object, and criticism rarely goes beyond the comparison. Ideological representation, because it rejects imitation, does not, of course, invite comparison. Blake's rejection of imitation and preference for ideological representation make his intuitive grasp of medieval aesthetics fundamental. He equates particular reality with ideological or imaginative symbolism. London, a particular reality, is ideologically Jerusalem, Blake's city of imagination. In Milton Blake has London say, "My streets are my Ideas of Imagination."

Blake's landscapes are imaginative. He made only two known landscapes from life, a view of Chichester Cathedral and a view of the old mill at Felpham. Blunt feels that Blake might have been successful at landscape painting had he cultivated it.¹⁰ Blake's hatred of drawing from life makes such a possibility remote, and

⁹Panofsky, p. 243.

¹⁰Anthony Blunt, The Art of William Blake (New York, 1959), p. 68.

two drawings do not testify to an aptitude.

However, Blake's imaginative landscapes have a symbolic power seldom equalled in the history of art. The early landscape designs serve more as linear ornamentation than true landscape. The landscape background of the Job engravings is highly developed. The mood of landscape is in perfect harmony with the story of Job. The first illustration presents Job and his children against a landscape of plenty, of peace and harmony. When the messenger arrives to tell Job of the tragedy (no. 4), the landscape is still peaceful, but the angular lines of the running figures lend a note of violence to the scene. Hereafter, the landscape is jagged and barren, except for occasional ruins after the manner of Stonehenge. The sky is dark and foreboding. In the last plate the landscape had revived its positive appearance, and the sun and moon suggest that a month has elapsed. The musical instruments that hang in the tree in the first illustration are played in the last.

Blake's concept of landscape is not imitative realism, but symbolic vision. Landscape in Blake is not Sussex nor Felpham. Landscape is symbolic, and when Blake places the streets of London in his Jerusalem, the streets are symbols just as Jerusalem is. Oxford Street is a particular street and a symbol at the same time. Landscape is not the "thing out there" but a symbol of the infinity within. This ideological landscape is a medieval conception. What

Waetzoldt says of Wolgemut's attitude toward landscape might just as well be said of Blake.

They do not pretend to reproduce the form of Nature, but are formulae for representing Nature--'these are trees, those are rocks, etc.' The medieval mind was content with such landscapes, which in actual fact were merely symbols of landscape. No one in those days wanted to see a certain landscape or to recognize in the picture a spot he knew, [sic] the conception of art was quite sufficient if the symbols of these ideas could be recognized.¹¹

Blake's concept of landscape, then, is symbolic and allegorical, though his view is more complex than the attitude of late medieval art. For Blake, landscape is the essence of eternal presence.

Charles Leslie reports the following anecdote concerning Blake's reaction to a landscape drawing by John Constable.

The amiable but eccentric Blake, looking through one of Constable's sketch books, said of a beautiful drawing of an avenue of fir trees on Hampstead Heath, "Why, this is not drawing, but inspiration," and he (Constable) replied, "I never knew it before; I meant it for drawing."¹²

The oddity here is that the imitative and realistic work of John Constable should strike Blake as the highest kind of visionary expression (i. e., Inspiration). This would appear to be a contradiction, but again, Blake considers particular reality a symbol or metaphor equally with the idea or the imagination.

¹¹ Wilhelm Waetzoldt, Dürer and His Times (London, 1955), pp. 134-135.

¹² Charles Leslie, The Memoirs of the Life of John Constable (London, 1951), p. 280.

Where the imagination is principal, then drawing from life must be hampering.

Blake professes drawing from life always to have been hateful to him; and speaks of it as looking more like death, or smelling of mortality. Yet still he drew a good deal from life, both at the academy and at home.¹³

How much is a "good deal"? The Blake drawings which have survived suggest that Blake did very little drawing from life.¹⁴ In the two volumes of Blake drawings edited by Keynes¹⁵ there are only six of the 138 that can be identified with certainty as having been drawn from life. Of the six, one drawing may not be Blake's. The portrait of Catherine Blake (plate 10, Blake's Pencil Drawings) is not in the style of Blake. The right hand shading is uniform; Blake generally preferred cross-hatching or a mixed direction of line for shading. Other heads drawn from life by Blake are quite round; this face is narrow. Keynes places the date of this drawing around 1803 since the page on which it is drawn was printed in 1802 (a proof of page 9 of Hayley's Ballads). The drawing might have been made several years after 1803. Another question presents itself. After

¹³Symons, p. 315.

¹⁴By "drawing from life" I mean drawing from a subject immediately before one, or as Blake would say "copying Nature." Blake finally condemned copying nature because it was the practice of the mortal and perishing eye.

¹⁵Geoffrey Keynes, Pencil Drawings by William Blake (London, 1927), plates 3, 40, 44, 55, and 81.

Catherine Blake's death in 1831 it was in the possession of Frederick Tatham. Tatham believed it to be Blake's and inscribed "Mrs. Blake Drawn by Blake."¹⁶ In a letter to W. M. Rossetti (Nov. 6, 1862), Tatham declares, "I have sold Mr. Blake's works for thirty years."¹⁷ With eventual sale in mind, it would be to Tatham's advantage to attribute the drawing to Blake, or it may simply be that Tatham did not notice the characteristics of the drawing. If this drawing is by Blake's hand, it is one of those anachronisms that now and then occur in the practice of drawing.

The most conventional of Blake's life drawings is the study of a standing man with the right arm extended.¹⁸ Blake is obviously competent and careful in this study. The shading is after Blake's manner of engraving. The second toes are longer than the great toes, and the face is characteristically round and nondescript. Blake apparently chose this kind of face for practical reasons (where he attempts individuality in a face, the results are frequently caricature as in the visionary heads Blake drew for Varley).

The portraits of Varley and Linnell (plate 40 in Pencil Drawings of William Blake and plate 44 in Blake's Pencil Drawings) are un-

¹⁶ Mrs. Blake lived her last years in Tatham's house and all of Blake's remaining works were left to him. Symons, p. 238.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁸ Keynes, Pencil Drawings (London, 1927), plate 3.

distinguished as portraits since they are affected by the formula Blake had already practiced in his drawings for many years. And the self-portrait in the Rossetti MS can best be described as a caricature. Blake's portrait of an infant (Plate #7) suffers from the same idiosyncrasy. The very nature of portraiture demands distinct, individual characteristics. There is little wonder that Blake's trouble with Hayley stemmed in part from the portrait work Hayley wanted done. Blake writes to his brother James on January 30, 1803, that he will not be made into a portrait painter.

...he Hayley thinks to turn me into a Portrait Painter as he did Poor Romney, but this he nor all the devils in hell will never do.¹⁹

Blake is aware at this time of his unsuitability for portrait painting. From Felpham, Blake writes to Butts (September 11, 1801) about a portrait of Butts he has not been able to finish.

Next time I have the happiness to see you, I am determined to paint another Portrait of you from Life in my best manner, for Memory will not do in such minute operations; for I have now discovered that without Nature before the painter's Eye, he can never produce any thing in the walks of Natural Painting.²⁰

Blake goes on to admit that historical designs--and here Blake appears to mean the contrived picture--are quite different from

¹⁹ Geoffrey Keynes, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake (London, 1927), p. 1069.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 1058.

portrait painting.

Historical Designing is one thing & Portrait Painting another, & they are as Distinct as any two Arts can be. Happy would that man be who could unite them!²¹

These apologetics are appropriate to a patron Blake does not wish to offend. Blake laments that the two cannot be united. Other painters, Raphael and Dürer¹¹ for example, have united the two with conspicuous success. Blake is not unique when he attempts to excuse a weakness on grounds of incompatibility, but by 1810, so determined that his weakness is a strength, Blake asserts that the copiers of nature are incorrect and the copiers of the imagination are correct.²²

By 1773 at the age of 16, Blake adopted a mannerism of Michelangelo and the Renaissance. Blake engraved a print called "Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion." He copied an engraving of Salviati's after Michelangelo's fresco of the crucifixion of St. Peter. There can be no question about Blake's early mastery of copy work despite the fact that this plate was reworked by Blake twenty years later.²³ Keynes points out Blake's adopted mannerism, "the classical foot" called "the strong foot" in Dürer's work on pro-

²¹Ibid.

²²Geoffrey Keynes, The Writings of William Blake (London, 1925), III, p. 129.

²³Keynes, Studies, p. 46.

portion, The Writings of Albrecht Dürer (New York, 1958), p. 240:

It is interesting to notice that Michelangelo's figure is represented with "the classical foot," that is, with feet having second toes considerably longer than the great toes. This peculiarity was seized upon by the apprentice, who always afterwards drew feet showing these proportions. The idiosyncrasy was certainly deliberate, for Blake usually drew human hands and feet with particular care.²⁴

This same foot appears in the life drawing of the standing male figure mentioned earlier.

During his apprenticeship Blake apparently read Fuseli's translation of Johann Winckelmann's Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks.²⁵ Winckelmann admires Michelangelo and Raphael; he expresses a distaste for drawing from life; he believes garments ought to reveal rather than hide the human form. Blake later confirms these principles in his own work.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 47.

CHAPTER II

THE AESTHETICS OF BLAKE'S CHALCOGRAPHY

The Designer proposes to Engrave, in a correct and finished line manner of Engraving, similar to those original Copper Plates of ALBERT DÜRER, LUCAS, HISBEN, ALDEGRAVE and the old original Engravers, who were great Masters in Painting and Designing, whose method, alone can delineate Character as it is in this Picture, where all the Lineaments are distinct.¹

What is aesthetically valid in one medium may prove unsuccessful in another. Oil painting, for instance, leads to an aesthetics where masses of color are important; in other words, it leads naturally to a study of lights and shadows and away from outline. The aesthetics of Blake depend entirely on the use of line. Engraving is the source of this point of view. To understand this attitude one must understand the process. The craftsman engraves the lines with steel tools called gravers and burins.

The gravers are tempered steel instruments with oblique points and wooden or cork-covered handles which are designed to fit into the palm of the hand. The steel is grasped with the thumb and fingers near its point, and the edge of the thumb must press against and glide along the surface of the plate in order to guide the point in a free and sensitive manner and to prevent it from becoming buried in the metal.²

¹Geoffrey Keynes, The Writings of William Blake (London, 1925), III, p. 121.

²Ralph Mayer, The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques (New York, 1957), pp. 591-592.

An unskilled hand is likely to skip, to make broken and incomplete lines, and frequently to bury the graver tip in the metal, making an awkward black smudge on the proof.

The plate rests upon a circular leather pad, and is held by the engraver's left hand in such a way that it can be tilted and revolved, these motions being coordinated with the movements of the graver and used equally, especially in engraving curved lines.³

The necessity of working in this manner and the skill required to make clear, precise lines presume the aesthetic virtue of clear outline. Basire's clean-line manner of engraving was thoroughly impressed upon Blake. Woolett, a fellow engraver of Basire's, engraved in broken, bungling lines and often ridiculed the clean line of Basire's engraving.

Woolett I know did not know how to Grind his Graver. I know this; he has often proved his Ignorance before me at Basire's by laughing at Basire's knife tools and ridiculing the Forms of Basire's other Gravers till Basire was quite dash'd & out of Conceit with what he himself knew, but his Impudence had a Contrary Effect on me. Englishmen have been so used to Journeymen's undecided bungling that they cannot bear the firmness of a Master's Touch.⁴

English engraving was not highly regarded on the Continent. According to Blake, Gravelot once told Basire that the English might be very clever in their opinions, but that they did not know how to draw the drawing.⁵ Apparently Gravelot and the Continental craftsmen preferred clear outline. Clear line is so important to Blake that he is prompted

³ Ibid.

⁴ Keynes, The Writings of William Blake, III, p. 139.

⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

to assert:

Every Line is a Line of Beauty; it is only fumble and Bungle which cannot draw a Line; this only is Ugliness. That is not a line which doubts & hesitates in the Midst of its Course.⁶

Blake stands firmly against all art where line is obscured by color or chiaroscuro. There are those who argue that lines are only abstractions and do not really exist in nature. Blake answers:

They say there is no Strait Line in Nature; this Is a Lie, like all that they say. For there is Every Line in Nature.⁷

Blake's concept of outline is synonymous with form. Everything depends on where the form or outline is put.⁸ This concept goes beyond the engraver's virtue into a principle of aesthetic dogma and eventually into a philosophical point of view. Blake says in "A Descriptive Catalogue":

The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art, and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling.⁹

Such is Blake's aesthetic principle. He goes on to apply the principle of outline to perception.

⁶Ibid., p. 139.

⁷Ibid., p. 138.

⁸Geoffrey Keynes, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake (London, 1927), p. 779.

⁹Ibid., pp. 805-806.

How do we distinguish the oak from the beech, the horse from the ox, but by the bounding outline: How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements?¹⁰

There is a moral application.

What is it that builds a house and plants a garden but the definite and determinate? What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions?¹¹

Existence itself is dependent upon the bounding line.

Leave out this line, and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist.¹²

From art to observation, from moral precept, and from a passage in Proverbs,¹³ Blake makes the engraver's virtue into universal principle.

The quality of an engraving is generally judged by its clarity of detail, since its minute lines encourage an almost infinite development. Apparently Basire demanded clear outline from his apprentices and made a virtue of minute discrimination in the detail of prints he published.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Proverbs 8:27 When he established the heavens,
I was there
When he drew a circle on the face of the deep.

Blake's adoption of the aesthetic principle of minute discrimination is obvious.¹⁴ By combining the theory of outline with the principle of discrimination, Blake has set forth his concept of perception and his primary aesthetic point-of-view. When Reynolds says that the "general effect of the whole" is the painter's concern, Blake retorts:

A Lie! Working up Effect is more an operation of Indolence than the Making out of the Parts, as far as Greatest is more than Least. I speak here of Rembrandt's & Ruben's & Reynold's Effects. For Real Effect is Making out the Parts, & it is Nothing Else but That.¹⁵

The virtue of engraved detail is applied to the execution of oil painting. Blake molds this idea into a concept of the sublime. "Without Minute Neatness of Execution The Sublime Cannot Exist! Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas."¹⁶ He repeats that "Singular & Particular Detail is the Foundation of the Sublime", and "Minuteness is their Whole Beauty".¹⁷ Fresco is sublime because it "is the most minute."¹⁸ Anything that endangers clear outline or clear detail endangers beauty. "Broken Colours & Broken Lines & Broken Masses are Equally Subversive of the Sublime".¹⁹ When Reynolds calls peculiar marks "defects,"

¹⁴ Keynes, "The Engravers Apprentice," Blake Studies.

¹⁵ Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 976.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 987.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 988.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 998.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 995.

Blake replies, "Peculiar Marks are the Only Merit".²⁰ Perception is not possible without attention to particulars. "Unless you Consult Particulars you Cannot even Know or See Mich. Ango. or Rafael or any Thing Else."²¹ His theory of knowledge rests on the doctrine of particulars. "To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit. General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess."²² "Strictly speaking All Knowledge is Particular."²³ The whole of art is to be judged on this basis. Blake asserts that "Complicated & Minute Discrimination of Character" is the whole of art.²⁴ Even the history painter draws the hero, man, "most minutely in Particular."²⁵ This doctrine of particulars lies implicit in such statements as "Obscurity is Neither the Source of the Sublime nor of any Thing else,"²⁶ and "Rembrandt was a Generalizer."²⁷

Blake's literary criticism rests on this doctrine; when he describes

²⁰Ibid., p. 1005.

²¹Ibid., p. 985.

²²Ibid., p. 977.

²³Ibid., p. 989.

²⁴Ibid., p. 998.

²⁵Ibid., p. 996.

²⁶Ibid., p. 1007.

²⁷Ibid., p. 1012.

the picture of Chaucer in "A Descriptive Catalogue," particular lineament of character is a virtue. "But I know that where there are no lineaments there can be no character."²⁸ And further on he says: "neither character nor expression can exist without firm and determinate outline."²⁹

Blake sums up his doctrine of particulars in "A Descriptive Catalogue":

Both in Art & in Life, General Masses (a concept derived from the practice of oil painting) are as much Art as a Pasteboard Man is Human. Every man has Eyes, Nose & Mouth; this Every Idiot knows, but he who enters into & discriminates most minutely the Manners & Intentions, the Characters in all their branches, is the alone Wise or Sensible Man, & on this discrimination All Art is founded."³⁰

In fact, all that is good and true and wise consists in particulars, because "General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge; it is in Particulars that Wisdom consists & Happiness too."³¹

Blake makes a number of favorable references to William Hogarth,³² so he must have been familiar with The Analysis of Beauty (1753) and Hogarth's theorizing on the serpentine Line of Beauty. Blake's state-

²⁸ Ibid., p. 792.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 805.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 836.

³¹ Ibid., p. 837.

³² Keynes, Writings, III, pp. 121, 128, 130, 136.

ment that every line is a Line of Beauty is proof that he was familiar with the theory.

The eye hath this sort of enjoyment in winding walks, and serpentine rivers, and all sorts of objects, whose forms, as we shall see hereafter, are composed principally of what, I call, the waving and serpentine lines. Intricacy in form therefore, I shall define to be the peculiarity in the lines, which compose it, that leads the eye a wanton kind of chace, and from the pleasure that gives the mind, intitles [sic] it to the name of beautiful . . . ³³

Blake has made plentiful use of this serpentine line in his drawings and noticeably in his illuminated books. Michelangelo also made use of this theory in his compositions. ³⁴ Had Blake not been familiar with Hogarth, he might just as well have derived his use of this line from the practice of Michelangelo who, according to Mazzo, derived the Line of Beauty from observation.

. . . Michelangelo's serpentine line, derived from a flame, should be combined by the painter with the pyramidal form. The serpentine represents the "tortuosity of a living snake when crawling, which is the very shape of a flame of fire when it flickers." The form is akin to that of an S, and this general form must be observed in the limbs as well as the trunk. ³⁵

Scholars claim Michelangelo's derivation was from the ancients. ³⁶

Marcus de Scienna, Michelangelo's pupil, says that "the greatest grace

³³Peter Quennell, Hogarth's Progress (New York, 1955), p. 229.

³⁴Robert Clements, Michelangelo's Theory of Art (New York, 1961), p. 175.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p. 177.

that a picture can have is that it expresses life and motion, as that of a flame of fire."³⁷

Notice how the idea of living form and fire and serpent is repeatedly paralleled. Blake's use of fire as a symbol of life and energy must be indebted to the theory of the Line of Beauty.

Engraving at best is tedious and is commonly drudge work. The visionary who wishes to give graphic expression to his imagination can only find engraving hampering. A more spontaneous graphic method therefore is essential. Contemporary references about Blake's invention of illuminated printing are rather sketchy. According to J. T. Smith (1828) from whom Gilchrist gets the story, Blake's process of illumination was the result of an economical measure and the direct dictation of his deceased brother Robert.

Blake, after deeply perplexing himself as to the mode of accomplishing the publication of his illustrated songs, without their being subject to the expense of a letterpress, his brother Robert stood before him in one of his visionary imaginations, and so decidedly directed him in the way in which he ought to proceed, that he immediately followed his advice, by writing his poetry, and drawing his marginal subjects of embellishments in outline upon the copper-plate with an impervious liquid, and then eating the plain parts of lights away with aqua-fortis considerably below them, so that the outlines were left as a stereotype.³⁸

Cunningham tells essentially the same story³⁹ but without mentioning

³⁷Henry Poore, Pictorial Composition (New York, 1903), p. 125.

³⁸Symons, p. 363.

³⁹Ibid., p. 403.

any economic motive. The forthright simplicity of this account overlooks a major difficulty. Writing his poetry directly on the plate would require writing in reverse. Such script, written by the right-handed Blake, would appear slightly left-leaning on the proof. Blake's script does not have this characteristic. Keynes reproduces a tiny plate where some of the script is reversed, while the rest is right.⁴⁰

Both sets of script are exactly alike; so there is no evidence that Blake wrote his script backward on the plate. Apparently Blake made the drawing and script on paper in an acid-resistant medium and then applied the paper to a heated plate, or pressed the back of the paper against the plate with a heated roller so that the drawing and script would adhere reversed. The paper could be removed by softening in water. Corrections or additional ornament could be applied directly to the plate with a brush. Then the plain areas could be etched away, leaving the text and illustration in stereotype. After etching and cleaning, if an area was too black and needed more white, the artist could engrave and scrape out the area.⁴¹ Blake called it "woodcutting on copper." His memorandum reads, "To Woodcut on Copper: Lay a ground as for etching; trace & c [sic] , & instead of Etching the blacks, Etch the whites & bite it in."⁴²

⁴⁰ Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 715.

⁴¹ Keynes, A Study of the Illuminated Books of William Blake (New York, 1964), p. 15.

⁴² Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 891.

Blake's first reference to illuminated printing was in the last section of "An Island in the Moon" (1787).

" . . . thus Illuminating the Manuscript. "

"Ay, " said she, "that would be excellent. "

"Then, " said he, "I would have all the writing Engraved instead of Printed, & at every other leaf a high finished print--all in three volumes folio and sell them a hundred pounds apiece. "They would print off two thousand. "

"Then, " said she, "whoever will not have them will be ignorant fools & will not deserve to live. "⁴³

Blake is certain that his process would prove successful, but by 1793 he found it necessary to make an effort to create a demand for his illuminated books. Blake tells the public he has

invented a method of Printing both Letter-press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand, than before discovered, while it produces works at less than one fourth of the expense.⁴⁴

Such a method "combines the Painter and the Poet."⁴⁵

⁴³Ibid., p. 887.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 888.

⁴⁵The artist and the poet combined in the seventeenth-century to produce emblems. The emblem consists of a lemma or motto, an icon, and a poetic epigram. Blake's illuminations lack the lemma and his method combines picture and poem intrinsically. The writers of emblems begin with the picture and write an epigram to fit. This approach is extrinsic. The influence of the emblem on Blake's art can only be considered superficial since his content and method are basically different. Rosemary Freeman, English Emblem Books (London, 1948), pp. 24 and 28.

CHAPTER III

SOME MINOR CONSIDERATIONS

Blake's invention of illuminated printing is a singular achievement. His objection to oils rests upon the solid ground of observation.

Oil will not drink or absorb Colour enough to stand the test of very little Time and of the Air; it grows yellow, and at length brown. It was never generally used till after Van Dyke's time.¹

The observation is sound, but his history is faulty. The Van Eycks, not Van Dyke, are credited with the introduction of oils as a painting medium.² Oils had been in general use for about 150 years before Van Dyke (Van Eycks is 15th Century, Van Dyke, the 17th Century). However, Blake's objection to the darkening effects of oil is clearly in mind when he remarks in his Annotations to Reynold's "Discourses":

When Sir Joshua Reynolds died
All Nature was degraded;
The King drop'd a tear into the Queen's Ear,
And all his Pictures Faded.³

Time has revealed the soundness of Blake's prejudice, but this same belief leads him to confuse tempera and fresco with water color. Blake says in "A Descriptive Catalogue":

¹Ibid., p. 776.

²Charles Eastlake, Methods and Materials of Painting of the Great Schools and Masters (New York, 1960), pp. 265-267.

³Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 978.

Fresco Painting is properly Miniature, or Enamel Painting; every thing in Fresco is as high finished as Miniature or Enamel, although in Works larger than Life, The Art has been lost: I have recovered it.⁴

The execution of my Designs, being all in Water-colours, (that is in Fresco) are regularly refused to be exhibited by the Royal Academy, and the British Institution has, this year, followed its example, . . .⁵

Water color, Blake tells us, is fresco, and miniatures or enamels are also fresco. Blake's confusion is difficult to excuse. There was no confusion in Blake's day. Charles Eastlake, a contemporary of Blake's, reports:

Fresco painting requires, as is well known, to be executed in portions; the surface of fresh plaster which is laid on when the painter is about to begin his day's work must be covered and completed, as a portion of a picture, before such plaster is dry; and so on, till the whole design is executed.⁶

Painting in wet lime plaster cannot even remotely be defined as water-color. Miniatures were generally painted in tempera and then enameled to insure a waterproof surface.

Perhaps the reason for Blake's confusion lies in his biography. Blake was fifty-two when he published "A Descriptive Catalogue," he was something of a recluse, and he was convinced that all criticism was the result of envy. Given these conditions, Blake must have been

⁴Ibid., p. 776-777.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Eastlake, p. 141.

tempted to greater nonsense than this. Certainly the secretary at the Royal Academy would have rejected Blake's "frescos" on the ground that a man who calls water-color fresco simply cannot know what he is about. Much of the misunderstanding and "envy" of Blake's contemporaries was in large part the result of Blake's own narrow-mindedness and too-thorough contempt for the official art of his day.

Blake's experimental pictures "laboured to a superabundant blackness" (VII, VIII, IX)⁷ should never have been exhibited. Blake excuses himself on visionary grounds, that "they are foundations for grand things."⁸ Perhaps they are there as an excuse for the argument he writes. In any other light Blake would sound like an amateur making excuses for incompetence. Whatever Blake's reason, there is little wonder that spectators were more impressed by his apparent eccentricity than by the "foundations for grand things."

⁷ Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 801.

⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

RAPHAEL VERSUS RUBENS: A CLASSIC AESTHETIC ARGUMENT

The Venetian and Flemish practice is broken lines, broken masses, and broken colours. Mr. B's practice is unbroken lines, unbroken masses, and unbroken colours. Their art is to lose form; his art is to find form, and to keep it.

--"A Descriptive Catalogue"

Artists usually fall into two opposing camps: those who consider line fundamental and those who consider color and mass essential. The argument is contemporary. Pietro Annigoni, arguing against abstract expressionism in 1956, states that "it is undeniable that in order to become an expressive element, colour must be subordinate to outline and to chiaroscuro, that is to drawing."¹ During the Renaissance the Florentines, Michelangelo especially, considered drawing fundamental to the practice of art. Michelangelo stigmatized the incompetent draftsman.

Vasari records Michelangelo's complaint that incompetent artists endeavor to cloak poverties of technique "with a variety of tints and shades of color." Armenini recalls Michelangelo's excoriation of the simple-minded public "Which look more at a green, a red, or similar high colors than at the figures which show spirit and movement."²

Blake almost paraphrases Michelangelo when he remarks, "In a work of Art it is not Fine Tints that are required; but Fine Forms; fine

¹Charles Cammell, Memoirs of Annigoni (London, 1956), p. 126.

²Clements, p. 250.

Tints without, are nothing."³ For Blake form and outline are the same thing. Michelangelo complains that Titian, like the other Venetians, lacks adequate drawing.

Buonarroti praised it (Titian's Danaë) considerably, saying that its coloring and manner pleased him greatly, but that it was a shame that in Venice people did not learn from the beginning to draw well, and that Venetian painters did not have a better manner in their study.⁴

Blake asserts, "The unorganized Blots & Blurs of Rubens & Titian are not Art, . . ."⁵ and "Such art of losing the outlines is the art of Venice and Flanders, . . ."⁶

Blake's hierarchy of aesthetic value becomes clear when set in opposing columns.

<u>Inspired Genius</u>	<u>the depressors of art</u>
outline (form)	chiaroscuro and color
Florence and Rome	Venice and Flanders
the antique and Gothic	modern daubers, Reynolds
Raphael	Rubens ⁷
Michelangelo	Rembrandt ⁷

³Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 808.

⁴Clements, p. 286.

⁵Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 814.

⁶Ibid., p. 805.

⁷Rubens and Rembrandt are masters of line drawing. Perhaps Blake was not familiar with their drawings, or chose to ignore them.

<u>Inspired Genius</u>	<u>the depressors of art</u>
Dürer	Titian
Romano	Correggio
Imaginative Vision	corporeal, vegetable eye

The difference between inspiration and degradation according to Blake appears to be the clarity and determination of line and the obscuring of that line by chiaroscuro or color. The schools and artists that place outline foremost are representative of eternal imagination, while the possessors of finite, vegetable eyes limit eternal clarity by obscuring techniques. Blake further complicates matters by some apparent contradictions.

Leave out this line (outline or form), and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist.⁸

By implication the outline is life itself, nature; there can be no existence without it. The outline is the perception of form, and the creation of form. In "The Ghost of Abel" Blake says that nature has no outline. "Nature has no Outline, but Imagination has. Nature has no Tune, but Imagination has. Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity."⁹ Blake uses outline in two distinct senses. Aesthetically he means an art in which the line or drawing dominates, that is, a

⁸ Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 806.

⁹ Ibid., p. 769.

tinted or colored drawing. Philosophically he means perception.

There is no way to separate Blake's aesthetic outline from perceptive outline. He never uses it in one sense without implying the other.

Blake's argument with Reynolds is therefore both philosophical and aesthetic. When Reynolds says that Raphael's works in the Vatican left little impression, Blake retorts:

Men who have been Educated with Works of Venetian Artists under their Eyes cannot see Rafael unless they are born with Determinate Organs.¹⁰

That is, with eyes able to perceive outline. This aesthetic point of view is not the simple adoption of a compatible outlook but the result of Blake's theory of perception. In short, those who do not place outline first cannot see. Blake argues that everything in art is as determinate as one's perception.

The Man who asserts that there is no such Thing as softness in Art, & that every thing in Art is Definite & Determinate, has not been told this by Practise, but by Inspiration and Vision, because Vision is Determinate & Perfect, & he copies That without Fatigue, Every thing being Definite & Determinate.¹¹

He goes on to add his critical corollary that "Softness is Produced alone by Comparative Strength & Weakness in the Marking out of the Forms."¹¹

There is another point here. When Blake speaks of perceiving, he means seeing what is in the mind's eye. Outward Nature is a delusion and snare;

¹⁰Ibid., p. 973.

¹¹Ibid., p. 986.

the inner vision is the eternal reality. That alone is definite and determinate.

COPYING

Blake's attitude toward copying is quite positive. Reynolds condemns those who spend much of their time making finished copies. Blake retorts:

This is most False, for no one can ever Design till he has learned the language of Art by making many Finished Copies both of Nature & Art & whatever comes in his way from Earliest Childhood.¹²

Copying is how the artist learns the language of his art.¹³ Blake says in his "Annotations to Reynolds's 'Discourses'" that copying is the storing up of materials¹⁴ upon which to draw in the future. When Reynolds condemns the servile copying of the model, Blake answers, "Contemptible! Servile Copying is the Great Merit of Copying."¹⁵ This is certainly an engraver's virtue and the essence of his craft. Whether one renders nature or art, copying is of great merit to Blake. "The difference between a bad Artist & a Good One Is: the Bad Artist Seems to copy a Great deal. The Good one Really does Copy a Great

¹²Ibid., p. 984.

¹³Ibid., p. 974.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 983.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 984.

deal."¹⁶ Copying imaginative works of art is implicit here. Ultimately Blake rejects rendering nature because it is the practice of the mortal eye. Copying the inspired forms of the mind's eye becomes foremost since these are the everlasting outlines of creation.

THE FLORID, THE ORNAMENTAL, AND THE GREAT STYLES

There was much discussion among theoretical aestheticians in Blake's day about the ornamental style, the florid style, and the great style. The Age of Reason assumed that Art, like morality, could eventually be reduced to a set of rules and that genius would eventually explain itself in general terms. Blake rebelled because his doctrine of particulars made such revolt imperative. Reynolds comments that the florid style captivates the eye for a time and Blake retorts:

A Lie! The Florid Style, such as the Venetian and the Flemish, Never Struck me at Once nor At-All.

The Style that Strikes the Eye is the True Style, But a Fool's Eye is Not to be a Criterion.¹⁷

The florid style, then, is synonymous with the Venetians according to Blake and of no consequence since only the true style matters. The nature of the true style is vague, but only one who is capable of perceiving it can recognize it. Blake explains his idea of the true or ornamental style.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 974.

This is not a Satisfactory Answer. To produce an Effect of True Light & Shadow is Necessary to the Ornamental Style, which altogether depends on Distinctness of Form. The Venetian ought not to be called the Ornamental Style.¹⁸

Blake goes on to say that distinct form, clear outline, learned and noble,¹⁹ distinguish this style. Michelangelo, the Bolognian, and Roman schools²⁰ possess the ornamental style in the highest degree.²¹ The great style "is always Novel or New, ... Original & Characteristical."²² Despite the terms Blake uses to describe what he considers the true style of art, he fails to make any appreciable clarification. Only clear outline emerges as his aesthetic criterion for the true style.

ART, HISTORY, AND EMPIRE--AN ENTANGLED LOGIC

Blake believes that there is no progression in art,²³ that one era is equal to all others (that is, there was no Golden Age when art prospered), and that genius is always above the age in which it finds itself.²⁴ This reasoning is difficult to reconcile with his failure to understand the high

¹⁸Ibid., p. 993.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 1011.

²⁰Ibid., p. 1010.

²¹Ibid., p. 1005.

²²Ibid., p. 1000.

²³Ibid., p. 1003.

²⁴Ibid., p. 991.

esteem Reynolds' "Discourses" received,²⁵ and with the belief that his own age was degraded and his own talents unappreciated.²⁶ Blake reverses Reynolds' assumption that necessities, then accommodations, then ornaments made cultivated life.

The Bible says that Cultivated Life Existed First. Uncultivated Life comes afterward from Satan's Hirelings. Necessaries, Accommodations & Ornaments are the whole of Life. Satan took away Ornament First. Next he took away Accommodations, & then he became Lord & Master of Necessaries.²⁷

This might be read as an attack on the social evils of Blake's day.

However, everything comes into being innate and complete. What happens thereafter is cyclic degradation. Cultivated life existed first; Blake contradicts himself by implying a golden age before Satan made himself master of necessities. Blake never develops the possibilities here except to complain that English society does not encourage the true style although art is one of the foundations of empire.

Rationalism and empire regard conformity, consensus, and the general good as essential. Romanticism objects. Barzun calls this complaint "The Classic Objection" against rationalism. The romantic insists:

on the reality of double-mindedness and self-contradiction. He denies the beauty and fitness of the conventions that bind men together and prefers the loose human diversity. Sharply aware

²⁵Ibid., p. 979.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 970-971.

²⁷Ibid., p. 971.

of his own desires, he argues that the social rule is oppressive and unjust, so that he becomes, potentially at least, an anarchist.²⁸

Blake's social objections become more clearly romantic.

Being an anarchist in an anarchical world, he places a high value on effort, strife, energy. He is therefore in the position of constantly bewailing a condition for which he is solely to blame: having refused all help from social conventions, his art, philosophy, and religion are bound to remain diversified, many shaped, chaotic - hence unsatisfying.²⁹

Assuming this motivation, Blake is bound to attack conventionally approved art and its proponents.

BLAKE'S CONCEPT OF THE SUBLIME

Blake's concept of the sublime is founded on his doctrine of particulars. "Without Minute Neatness of Execution The Sublime cannot Exist! Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas."³⁰ Without clear detailed drawing beauty cannot exist. Ideas must be precise to be grand. An aesthetic principle becomes philosophic. In his description of The Ancient Britons³¹ Blake says that there are three classes of men: the beautiful, the strong, and the ugly. As types these men represent:

the strong man

the human sublime
wisdom and energy

²⁸ Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic, and Modern (Boston, 1961), p. 37.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 987.

³¹ Ibid., Picture V, "A Descriptive Catalogue," p. 795.

	compactness, not extent nor bulk and acts from conspicuous superiority,
the beautiful man	the human pathetic intellectual, and not to be appended to folly and acts from duty and anxious solitude,
the ugly man	is human reason beast-like incapable of intellect and acts from love of carnage and delight in war. ³²

These suggestive figures might have become dominant in Blake's allegory, but they remain vague and undeveloped.

The works of antiquity can be equalled but not surpassed because they are the gift of God. For one

To suppose that Art can go beyond the finest specimens of Art that are now in the world, is not knowing what Art is; it is being blind to the gifts of the spirit.³³

Genius is only the workings of inspiration, which is eternal and perfect. These works cannot be surpassed. Blake includes Milton, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Raphael, the finest of ancient sculpture, architecture and painting, the Gothic, Greek, Hindu, and Egyptian. The time is 1809 and Blake is fifty-two. By about 1820 Blake's attitude toward classical antiquity made a profound change. Only the Gothic remained inspired. Greece and Rome, Babylon and Egypt, instead of fostering the arts, are the

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 789.

destroyers of art. So

"Let others study art: Rome has somewhat better to do, namely War and Dominion."

Rome and Greece swept Art into their maw and destroyed it; a Warlike State never can produce Art. It will Rob and Plunder and accumulate into one place, and Translate and Copy and Buy and Sell and Criticise, but not Make.³⁴

Politics depress Art. Blake goes on to relegate Greek antiquities to mathematics and the Gothic to eternal existence. "Grecian is Mathematic Form; Gothic is Living Form. Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory: Living Form is Eternal Existence."³⁵ Again the ancient classics are condemned as antichrist. "The Greek and Roman Classics is [sic] the Antichrist."³⁶ Blake's reversal of his former attitude is not easily explained. His preference for the Gothic is understandable. Apparently Blake became aware of the "empire" involved in the art of antiquity and was thereby obliged to condemn it as he had the art of the progressive contemporary "empire." Blake noticed:

Communal life became identified with the political state, and the normal individual with the ordinary citizen. From the Greek political theorist to the Roman legislator, Blake noticed a profound distrust of anyone with a loyalty beyond the state.³⁷

³⁴Ibid., p. 768.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p. 1028. (Annotations to Dr. Thornton's "New Translation of the Lord's Prayer," 1827).

³⁷Peter Fisher, "Blake's Attacks on the Classical Tradition," Philological Quarterly, XL (Jan., 1961), 1.

This coercion implies the degradation of art and the subjection of the individual to reason, hence Blake's rejection of classical antiquity.

Blake's idea of the sublime is based on the precision of ideas and drawing.

Classical antiquity is not sublime because of the degrading influence of empire. Only the Gothic is eternally sublime.

CHAPTER V

ON PERCEPTION

To understand Blake's aesthetic motive one must understand his philosophic concept of perception. His basic concept is formulated by 1788 in the series "There is no Natural Religion."

The first series offers the rationalistic argument that man can only perceive through his physical senses, no other senses can be deduced from the principal three (Blake does not explain what he means here); only organic thoughts can come from organic senses, man cannot desire what he has not perceived, and man's desires are limited to the objects perceived by the senses. Blake concludes that the limitations implied would soon bring life to a standstill were it not for poetic or prophetic perception.¹

The second series denies the first. Man's perceptions are not limited by the extent of his senses, limitations (reason or ratio) extend as more becomes known, bounds are hated because man's desire goes beyond limits, and is in fact, infinite; therefore, despair is man's eternal lot. Man is infinite because his desires are infinite. When his desires are limited by his organic senses, he sees narrowly by ratio only, i. e. the realm of reason. When man sees the infinite in all things, he sees God.

¹Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 147.

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour.²

Blake's conclusion is anthropomorphic: "Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is."³ Blake has not rejected organic perception, but has declared that it is too narrow to answer the infinite desire in man. Ratio or organic perception is rationalistic philosophy and experimental science. By limiting one's view to the knowable (or Ratio), man fails to perceive the eternal infinity which is God.

"All Religions Are One" explains the sources and manifestations of infinite perception which Blake calls Poetic Genius (Inspiration, Imagination). All perceivable material forms are derived from Poetic Genius. As all men are outwardly alike and various, so is Poetic Genius. All philosophies and religions intend truth since all find their source in Poetic Genius. Their weaknesses are the weaknesses of individuals. Poetic Genius is also called the Spirit of Prophecy. The Old and New Testaments are derived from Poetic Genius (as are the Greek Fables⁴). Blake concludes by saying that "the true man is the source of Poetic Genius."⁵ So we come to Blake's statement: "For every thing that lives

²Ibid., p. 118.

³Ibid., p. 148.

⁴Ibid., p. 829.

⁵Ibid., pp. 148-149.

is Holy."⁶

What the organic senses perceive is infinity so long as one is not deluded by material existence. A material object is the organic limitation of organic perception. But the object should be perceived as a symbol of the eternal and infinite.

And it [art-prophecy] does this not by viewing the grain of sand, and then by means of abstract reasoning considering its relation to a greater controlling deity, but by visualizing that grain of sand as symbol of the deity itself, as the central form in the microcosm.⁷

Every object the organic senses perceive is a symbol of infinity. In other words, Blake "sees reality only in the mental experience, the concrete perceptual act"⁸ Wordsworth's regard for natural things leads Blake to object because Wordsworth does not have his eye on the infinite.

I see in Wordsworth the natural man rising up agst. the spiritual man continually, & then he is no poet but a heathen philosopher at Enmity agst. all true poetry or inspiration.⁹

Again, when Wordsworth claims that natural objects bring forth and strengthen the imagination, Blake retorts, "Natural objects always did & now do weaken, deaden & obliterate Imagination in me. W. must know

⁶Ibid., p. 204.

⁷Hazard Adams, "The Blakean Aesthetic", Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XIII (1954), 240.

⁸Ibid., p. 236.

⁹Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 1024.

that what he writes valuable is not to be found in Nature."¹⁰ What Blake opposes is materialism.¹¹ The intuition of the infinite world can be symbolized by the material forms he observes. He does not abstract from material experience, but through visionary forms.¹² The visionary knows that largeness and smallness are delusions, tricks of this world. What he seeks is apocalyptic vision, the return of all things to the one. He

begins with a grain of sand and ends with God, but ideally it begins where it ends and achieves a single image of reality, shifting by fallen analogy into other images.¹³

Blake's infinite perception is symbolic. Space-time relationships and material existence are the inventions of Ratio and organic perception. They are as nothing to the visionary. Reality is itself an apocalyptic vision. The Last Judgement is the critical triumph of good art and science over the bad. The visionary Last Judgement is:

an Overwhelming of Bad Art & Science. Mental Things are alone Real; what is call'd Corporeal, Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, its Existence an Imposture. Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool? Some People flatter themselves that there will be No Last Judgement & that Bad Art will be adopted & mixed with Good Art, That Error or Experiment will make a Part

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 1024-1025.

¹¹Joseph Chiari comes to a similar conclusion in Realism and Imagination (London, 1960), p. 16.

¹²Adams, p. 238.

¹³Ibid., p. 240.

of Truth, & they Boast that it is its Foundation; these People flatter themselves: I will not Flatter them. Error is Created. Truth is Eternal. Error, or Creation, will be Burned up, & then, & not till Then, Truth or Eternity will appear.¹⁴

Perception of the infinite is the key to The Last Judgement and this explains his own vision or perception:

It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it. I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action; it is as dirt upon my feet, No Part of Me. "What, " it will be Question'd, "When the Sun rises, do you not see a round "disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?" O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.' I question not my Corporeal or Vegetable Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it.¹⁵

Throughout his poetry Blake maintains the analogy of the window, or door, or gate, for expanding or narrowing perception. Expressions of this concept are among Blake's best poetry. In "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" reality perceived by the limited organic eye is an immensity in the eye of imagination. "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?"¹⁶ Ratio sees the bird; imagination sees the immense world of delight. The narrowness of this world is simply the narrowness of uninspired perception.

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro'

¹⁴Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 844.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 192.

narrow chinks of his cavern.¹⁷

The cavern or chamber becomes a symbol of organic or finite perception. The opening lines of "Europe" give expression to the perception of ratio.

Five windows light the cavern'd Man: thro' one he breathes the air;
Thro' one hears music of the spheres; thro' one the eternal vine
Flourishes, that he may receive the grapes; Thro' one can look
And see small portions of the eternal world that ever groweth;
Thro' one himself pass out what time he please; but he will not,
For stolen joys are sweet & bread eaten in secret pleasant.¹⁸

Blake implies quite clearly that this finite perception is willful. Liberty, and he means freedom from mere organic vision, can only come when "the cavern'd Man 'wills it so."¹⁹ The organic senses bind the mind in the chains of limitation. The Songs of Experience give an early expression of this metaphor in "London." The chains of the finite are:

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.²⁰

These same chains find expression in The First Book of Urizen (Chapter IV b):

4. Disorganiz'd, rent from Eternity,
Los beat on his fetters of iron,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁹See "A Song of Liberty", Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 203-204.

²⁰Ibid., p. 76.

And heated his furnaces, & pour'd
Iron odor and odor of brass.²¹

Los stands here for the infinite and the eternal. He is allegorically restricted and bound down by organic perception. The struggle of Los against Urizen is the struggle of the imagination against the limits of organic vision.

In the second letter to Thomas Butts dated November 22, 1802, Blake explains his double vision:

For double the vision my Eyes do see,
And a double vision is always with me.
With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey;
With my outward, a Thistle across m_y way.²²

The inward eye is the eternal and infinite eye of imagination; the outward, finite, organic vision. Blake strikes the thistle as the sun appears. But the thistle is a man and the sun is Los.

So I spoke & struck in my wrath
The old man weltering upon my path.
Then Los appear'd, descending before
My face in fierce flames; in my double sight
'Twas outward a Sun, inward Los in his might.²²

Newton's sleep and single or organic perception are the same. "May God us keep/ From Single vision & Newton's sleep!"²³ Blake describes the organic eye in Milton (Book the First, 5):

²¹Ibid., p. 249.

²²Ibid., p. 1067.

²³Ibid., p. 1068.

The Eye of Man a little narrow orb, clos'd up & dark,
 Scarcely beholding the great light, conversing with the Void;
 The Ear a little shell, in small volutions shutting out
 All Melodies & comprehending only Discord and Harmony;
 The Tongue a little moisture fills, a little food it cloys,
 Then brings forth Moral Virtue the cruel Virgin Babylon.

The finite senses bring law and limitation patterned after the sense's own limited perception while it denies its infinite desire²⁴ (see "There is No Natural Religion", First Series). Blake, the master of the rhetorical question, asks

Can such an Eye judge of the stars? & looking thro' its tubes
 Measure the sunny rays that point their spears on Udanadan?
 Can such an Ear, fill'd with the vapours of the yawning pit,
 Judge of the pure melodius harp struck by a hand divine?
 Can such closed Nostrils feel a joy? or tell of autumn fruits
 When grapes & figs burst their covering to the joyful air?
 Can such a Tongue boast of the living waters? or take in
 Ought [sic] but the Vegetable Ratio & loathe the faint delight?
 Can such gross Lips percieve [sic] ? alas folded within themselves
 They touch not ought, but pallid turn & tremble at every wind.²⁵

What the organic eye sees is as nothing compared to the eternal visions of the inward eye. The senses are too limited to comprehend the grandeur of the macrocosm, or the infinity within the microcosm. In Songs of Experience "the Fly" is a man like the poet, with the same joys and sorrows. Blake repeats the image when he restates the infinity of the microcosm in Milton (Book the First, 22):

Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand?

²⁴Ibid., p. 470.

²⁵Ibid., p. 471.

It has a heart like thee, a brain open to heaven & hell,
 Withinside wonderous & expansive: its gates are not clos'd:
 I hope thine are not: hence it clothes itself in rich array:
 Hence thou art cloth'd with human beauty, O thou mortal man.²⁶

Heaven, infinity, and eternity are not in the beyond but here and now in the apocalyptic eye of imagination. Even the future of organic life depends on the perception of infinite eternals. Man can create new Ratio only when he knows what he can annihilate and what not. The reader may

Judge there of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore,
 What is Eternal & what Changeable, & what Annihilable.
 The Imagination is not a State: it is Human Existence itself.
 Affection or Love becomes a State when divided from Imagination.
 The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State
 Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created.²⁷

The created limitations of organic sense can be recreated or destroyed at will. Forms, however, are eternal.

Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated: Forms cannot:
 The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife,
 But their Forms Eternal Exist For-ever. Amen. Hallelujah!²⁷

The reality of the senses, then, is a metaphor of what infinitely and eternally exists. Since most men are bound by organic vision and what Blake draws is from the eternally existent imagination, if he is to be understood, he must address himself to the corporeal understanding. However, Blake refuses to make himself explicit. "That which can be made Explicit to

²⁶
Ibid., . p. 498-499.

²⁷
Ibid., p. 529.

the Idiot is not worth my care."²⁸ Allegory addresses it he
 organic senses (Corporeal Understanding, while the immediate appre-
 hension of the imagination is perception of the infinite (Vision).²⁹ The
 aesthetics implied here leave the interpretation of his art problematic.
 Line and pigment address themselves to organic vision, and yet, the
 creator of these works says that he copies the eternal visions of
 his imagination. According to the artist, they are glimpses of the
 apocalypse.

The expression of a vision in art has some perplexing prerequisites.

To "realize" a vision in a work of art--that is, to make it convincing without aid of conventional signs or inscriptions--the artist has to fulfill two seemingly contradictory requirements. On the one hand, he must be an accomplished master of "naturalism", for only where we behold a world evidently controlled by what is known as the laws of nature can we become aware of that temporary suspension of these laws which is the essence of a "miracle"; on the other hand, he must be capable of transplanting the miraculous event from the level of factuality to that of an imaginary experience.³⁰

Here Panofsky is speaking of Dürer's illustrations of The Apocalypse.

Blake can in no sense be considered a master of "naturalism"; but he is master of the formula he chose to express himself in visually. The conventions of Blake's art never allow the viewer to be drawn into "naturalism." There is, from the first glance, an awareness that some-

²⁸ Ibid., p. 1039. (Letter to Dr. Trusler, August 13, 1799.)

²⁹ Adams, p. 239.

³⁰ Panofsky, pp. 55-56.

thing out of the ordinary is present. Gothic proportions engraved or stereotyped (illuminated) and brilliantly tinted with water color verify Panofsky's sense of "miracle."

Blake's aesthetics are in some senses medieval. The image in his soul which he claims to copy so carefully, the infinite and eternal nature he ascribes to his imagination, are essentially medieval.³¹ He emphasizes the narrowness of corporeal vision on the assumption that what imagination sees is real and eternal. Thomas Aquinas would be at home with these assumptions. But for the Middle Ages, the Apocalypse was in the future. For Blake it was ever-present in his double vision. Eternity and infinity were beyond death and the stars for St. Thomas. For Blake, they were here and now in the eye of imagination.

Now I may say to you, what perhaps I should not dare to say to anyone else: That I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd, & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams & prophecy & speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals: . . .³²

Blake's visions were thought eccentric and perhaps a little mad by the mundane of his day. Children, particularly, are capable of elucidating his ideas since they are on the side of imagination.³³ Blake cannot be entirely justified for refusing to be explicit. A man is not

³¹Ibid., p. 243.

³²Keynes, Poetry and Prose, p. 1052.

³³Ibid., p. 1040.

automatically weak or foolish when he finds Blake difficult and at times incomprehensible. Circumstances offered the poet-painter no opportunity to be more explicit.

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