

## William Blake, Illuminated Books, and the Concept of Difference

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Copies of Blake's illuminated books differ one from the other. Inferred from this fact are a set of mistaken assumptions about production, editing, and intention. Illuminated books appear to have been produced “one by one” (Grant 281) “as [Blake] got commissions” (Davids and Petrillo 154), or “with a particular customer in mind” (Erdman, *Complete Poetry and Prose* 786; henceforth referred to as E), and “over many years, beginning . . . in the late 1780s and not ending until the last years of his life” (Essick “William Blake, William Hamilton, and the Materials of Graphic Meaning” 857; henceforward referred to as “Materials”). [1] Moreover, revision seems continuous and deliberate, making each copy of a book seem like “a new edition” (Johnson 126), which in turn seems to express Blake's contempt for and rejection of conventional modes of graphic and book production. Hence, “every copy of every book” not only appears to have been produced uniquely, but also Blake appears to have “certainly intended [illuminated books] to be different” (Plowman 11). These positions are neatly summarized by Jerome McGann, who states that Blake intended that “each of his works *be* unique” and that “these differences” among copies were not “merely accidental [or] unimportant for the ‘meaning’ of Blake's work. Certainly to Blake they seemed immensely consequential; indeed—and he was quite right—they seemed definitive of the difference between one sort of art (free, creative) and another (commonplace, generalized)” (“Text” 275, 276). And yet, while designs as initially drawn on plates do differ from the designs as printed, and prints do differ one from the other, such variations do not signify a rejection of uniformity and all it supposedly represents, nor do they determine the print's meaning. The first kind of difference was inherent to a mode of production in which finishing was conceived as part of the inventive process, and the second kind—for example, the varying width of a river in a particular image—requires comparisons that Blake could not have expected or intended his readers to make. Before assuming ideological causes, one needs to examine the technical and material grounds for difference and to understand the history of the works being compared.

First, much of the coloring and recoloring of books, especially of early copies, was done by Mrs. Blake, who appears to have worked independently of Blake on some books and with him on others.

Thus, the marks and colors distinguishing one impression from another may not reflect Blake's hand or intention at all. Second, illuminated books were not printed and colored uniquely, one at a time over a number of years, but, with Mrs. Blake's help, in small editions. [2] Copies of an illuminated book produced in the same printing session, and thus in the same printing and coloring styles, are technically, materially. And stylistically far more *alike* than copies from different printing sessions, which could be and frequently were more than twenty years apart. And third, copies of books produced at different times are different because they were produced in different styles and according to different ideas of the Book. Indeed, *Songs of Innocence* copy B and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* copy Z, which have been reproduced by Dover publications and are routinely compared in classrooms to prove that each copy of an illuminated book is unique, were produced in 1759 and 1825 respectively, the former when illuminated prints were produced as pages in a book of poems and the latter when the prints were produced as miniature paintings (Viscomi, *Art* 18). If you were to compare the former with *Innocence* copy E, with which it was produced (but which, like most copies, has never been reproduced to provide such a comparison), and the latter with copy AA (reproduced only on microfilm), with which it was produced, you would see immediately how alike edition copies are (see *Book*, Plates I, III). You would not only see how ahistorical such comparisons and the claims of intentional uniqueness are, but also how suspect are readings based on such differences. For example, the river in "The Little Black Boy" in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* copy Z is wider than that of *Songs of Innocence* copy B, which for Myra Glazer indicates that "the child has had a longer, more arduous journey to endure" than in the first impression (235). Robert Essick, recognizing that "absences become present only through comparison," asks, "To whom could [Blake] be communicating the message?" ("Materials" 855, 858). [3] The river is wider in the copy Z impression because the plate borders were printed, which necessarily extended the bottom line of the river. But the presence of the border was due to the printing style used at that time for all illuminated books and not to Blake's desire to widen this particular river, let alone the river in this particular impression. Indeed, the features characteristic of late copies of illuminated books, such as single-sided printing, plate borders, frame lines, washed texts, translucent colors, and outlined figures, all of which alter the reader's experience and movement through a book's text, do not represent a rethinking of any particular image, poem, or book. They are matters of production style that show up

in *all* copies of all illuminated books reprinted at that time, *Songs*, as well as *Visions*, *America*, *Europe*, *Urizen*, *Marriage*, and *Milton*.

The overt similarities among impressions printed and colored in editions challenge Steven Carr's assertion that the “variability . . . embedded in the material processes of producing illuminated prints” was “radical” (182) and require the qualification of another assertion, that “Blake's habitual ‘touching up’ of prints with ink and scratchwork and, most especially, his ever-changing manner of illuminating a page further differentiate every version of a design, producing not only large-scale iconographic variants but also a subtler alterity in background details, figures’ lineaments and expressions, and the visual relationships linking together pictorial elements” (185). [4] Like most critics and scholars, Carr expresses an ahistorical idea of Blake's style in that he compares works regardless of when and how they were produced. Relatively speaking, few copies of illuminated books (e.g., none of the eleven recto/verso copies of *Visions* produced in 1793) were outlined in pen and ink, a feature characteristic of late copies and of early copies that had been recolored and/or salvaged (see *Book*, chaps. 15 and 33). Carr's claim that Blake's “manner” was “ever-changing” seems based on bibliographical descriptions of illuminated prints and not examination of an edition's impressions. For example, in G. E. Bentley's *Blake Books*, *Visions* plate7 is described as follows:

COLOURING: The MAN'S ROBE is Blue (A, B, G, J, O), Green (C), Purple (D, I), Pink (E), Black (E), reddish-Brown (H), pale Brown (K, Tate pull), Yellow (L), Green (M), or Grey (BMPR pull). The WOMAN, usually nude-Pink, is sometimes yellowish-Green (G) or Green (I). The SKY is bright with Purple (A-C, E, K-M), Pink (B, P), Yellow (D, G, M, O, P), Red or Orange (E-G, I, K, M, O, P, BMPR and Tate pulls) or Mustard (J). The SUN, usually Yellow or Orange, is Red (A, G) or pale Green (D).

VARIANTS: There is no sun in copies B, C, H, and the Tate pull. In B, C, E, L, there are Grey or Purple clouds from the wave to the right margin. Ordinarily the sun is a semicircle, but in E, F, I, M only one quarter of the sun is visible, and in O, P one eighth is visible, while in L we see the whole sun. In F, a thin, leafless Brown tree is added in ink in the bottom right margin. Copy B is inscribed “Solitary Coast.” (471)

Such detail, a requisite of descriptive bibliography, helps one to visualize individual impressions. But

because plate 7 and the other plates in *Visions* are grouped by repeated motifs and colors and not by technique and style, no two plates from *Visions* share the same groups. Consequently production patterns for the book are impossible to discern, chronology and sequence are impossible to determine, and variation among copies is impossible to dismiss as anything but intentional and extensive. Statements about illuminated books based on such bibliographical descriptions will be misleading, while those based on the examination of actual copies will be puzzling when infused with the idea of continuous variation. For example, David Erdman states that Blake “loathed . . . monotony . . . and when we consider how much variety he introduced into the printing and painting of his works, how distinctive each copy is in coloring and in the finishing of details, it is surprisingly how few truly variant details are to be found” (*Illuminated Blake* 15; henceforth referred to as *IB*). Erdman's summary of work produced between 1789 and 1827 combines characteristics of edition printing (“few truly variant details”) and characteristics of various production styles (distinct copies). When impressions from different editions are compared, variety does indeed seem to have been deliberately introduced into the printing itself, since formats and even tactile surfaces varied with each printing session. But impressions from the same printing session were *printed* the same. The inks, paper, pressure, size, wiping, even accidentals, and so on were repeated exactly and “monotonously.” [5]

Given the potential for change, the absence of pronounced differences among copies within an edition is quite surprising and the differences themselves seem minor, the inevitable result of a mode of production involving two people printing and coloring numerous impressions by hand and before collation and without prototypes. Differences within an edition were due also to the parameters of what was visually acceptable being very large—which is a kind way of saying that Blake kept many impressions that printmakers then as now would deem poorly printed, illegible, misaligned, etc., features that prompted William Muir, a professional lithographer and Blake's main nineteenth-century facsimilist, to declare that illuminated prints were produced with “a *skilful carelessness*.” [6] These parameters may reflect paper costs, but they may also reflect an awareness that absolute control over relief etching was not possible. As we shall see, Blake's idea of uniformity permitted variation; if variations were technically inevitable and aesthetically acceptable, then they could also be deliberately *allowed* to occur. Such variations among copies of the same edition, then, do not represent a rethinking

of the poem or page but a sensitivity to the generative powers of execution, to the logic of the tools, materials, and processes—and to the original contributions of an assistant. They no more signify *deliberate* revision or alteration of models or earlier copies than the repetition of colors, technique, and plate order in the last copies of *Songs* signifies “servile copying” of models. As is evinced by commercially produced engravings and colored prints, variation among illuminated prints is not extraordinary or unprecedented. Even the overt variations within an edition, like different ink colors or hand-drawn compositions, appear motivated by the desire to diversify stock, comparable to a publisher's practice of issuing a book in various formats, and not by anger at or desire to reject conventions or modes of production that Blake *chose* not to employ. Apparently the Blakes were not graphic purists; they were not interested in making an edition's copies *exactly* the same, but neither were they interested in making them completely different. The latter objective was technically realizable and the former almost so, but both would have required far more time and labor than was actually expended.

Edition printing means that copies of illuminated books can be grouped according to printing sessions, which in turn can be dated to reveal the history of a particular book and the pattern of illuminated print production in general. Such information refutes the idea that illuminated books cannot be edited, and supports the idea that they can be edited historically. By identifying variants and calculating their significance, the editor can define, date, and sequence the various versions of a book. Theoretically, all and *every* variation alters the relation among the signs that constitute the verbal-visual system of an illuminated poem (Carr, 182), but in practice it appears that the variations in production styles create distinct versions of a poem while coloring and even compositional variations within an edition usually do not. Variations in the style of production, because they are different in kind (e.g., facing pages vs recto-only leaves, or lightly washed images vs. images painted, outlined, and framed), alter the reading experience, whereas the latter type of variant, different in degree, usually do not—or, if they do, then how must be shown concretely and in detail and not simply asserted theoretically. Indeed, part of the critical and editorial process is to distinguish one kind of difference from the other, to determine whether a variant generates a new reading, and to ascertain whether that new reading was intended. Otherwise, as Essick has warned, the “interpreters ... are in danger of using Blake's graphics as little more than a foundation for their own mythologies” (“Materials” 859). [7]

As this brief summary suggests, theories about Blake's mode of book production and about how the books should be edited are grounded in the misinterpretation of a bibliographical fact and, as the remainder of this essay will argue, of Blake's intentions. The questions we need to ask ourselves are, How did Blake perceive these differences? Were they “immensely consequential”?

The assumption that variants were intended or perceived by Blake as meaningful, produced deliberately to destabilize the text and to make every copy of a book a separate version, is based partly on a misunderstanding of Blake's mode of production and partly on Blake's statement that “not a line is drawn without intention & that most discriminate & particular as Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant so Painting admit not a Grain of Sand of a Blade of Grass Insignificant much less and Insignificant Blur or Mark” (E 560). Blake wrote this in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, an important twenty-page elucidation in the *Notebook* of his aesthetics in general and, in particular, of an exceedingly detailed painting of the same title now presumed lost (Bullin 2:648). [8] The passage actually expresses one of Blake's primary aesthetic theories, that line was the foundation of art and that colors and washes were secondary. The entire passage reads:

General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge it is in Particulars that Wisdom consists & Happiness too. Both in Art & in Life General Masses are as Much Art as a Pasteboard Man is Human Every Man has Eyes None & 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. I intreat then that the Spectator will attend to the Hands & Feet to the Lineaments of the Countenances they are all descriptive of Character & not a line is drawn without intention & that most discriminate & particular as Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant so Painting admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass Insignificant much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark (E 560).

In practice, however, not all lines are equal. As revealed by Blake's sketches, drawings, and the pentimenti of the watercolors, the line that discriminates and particularizes is the line that finds and fixes form in the initially chaotic sketch of lines, marks, and blurs. Such a line, whether made in pencil or, as in finished watercolors, in pen, is necessarily made intentionally, with a “firm and decided hand” (E

576). In this two-part drawing process it is not the blank white paper that is minutely organized but the initial marks made on it, which requires a mind open to chance and a decisive hand. Described as “Making out the Parts,” [9] Blake's drawing style united invention and execution, a point Blake makes explicit in other descriptions of his drawing process: “an Original Invention [cannot] Exist without Execution Organized & minutely Delineated & Articulated Either by God or Man,” and, to differentiate his linear technique from the tonal techniques of the Flemish and Venetian artists, “Their art is to lose form, [Mr. B’s] art is to find form, and to keep it” (E 576, 538). “Organization,” sometimes used as an appositive to execution (E 637), implies having something to organize, and is thus a stage within the execution process. Because execution incorporates organization and involves decisions, it is also inseparable from intellect and invention: “A Facility in Composing is the Greatest Power of Art & Belongs to None but the Greatest Artists i.e. the Most Minutely Discriminating & Determinate” (E 643). Execution so defined means that “The unorganized Blots & Blurs of Rubens & Titian are not Art nor can their Method ever express ideas or imaginations any more than Popes Metaphysical Jargon of Rhyming” (E 576). In effect, material execution is to the artist as chaos is to God; it must be organized, which requires drawing out decisively its every beauty and firmly delineating them so invention can speak clearly. Indeed, Blake makes the analogy explicit in *A Descriptive Catalogue*: “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” (E 550). By these acts invention is articulated, is clear and intelligible utterance; without them, “Without Minute Neatness of Execution[,] The Sublime cannot Exist.” For Blake, firm outlines signified decisiveness; conversely, indetermined form reflected indecision and fuzzy thinking. The connection between mental perspicacity and material form was variously expressed: “All Sublimity is founded on Minute Discrimination,” “Singular & Particular Detail is the Foundation of the Sublime,” and the “Grandeur of Idea is founded on Precision of Ideas,” (E 643, 647, 646). [10]

Drawing is also the foundation of the sublime in the sense of being the place of origin, the place where grand ideas and images are *found*. By drawing—and making the initial marks constituting the drawing—the artist invents, in the sense of the word's root, “invenire,” to find. Henry Fuseli defines invention much the same way in his seventh lecture (1801): “to invent is to find: to find something presupposes its existence somewhere, implicitly or explicitly, scattered or in a mass” (Knowles 1:136-



137). Artistic form and meaning are found in the material world and by extension the medium itself, which Blake scents explicitly to acknowledge. Blake's comments about “finding form and keeping it,” about organizing execution” and “making out the parts” reflect an awareness that form and meaning were not fully preexistent. or as Essick has carefully shown that “intentionality” did not fully exist “prior to and outside the artist’s medium” (*William Blake and the Language of Adam* 190). The point is that in drawing as Blake practiced it not all lines and marks were intended and intention itself evolved through the medium. Blake's comments and practice challenge the theory that his was an eidetic imagination, or, at any rate, that his art was a faithful copying of fully formed, preexistent mental images. [11] Rather, form and meaning evolve bear the continual interactive relation between mind and language/medium, between invention and execution, as marks and erasures suggest other marks, directions, images, and ideas.

Blake expressed the idea that form was defined by line and not by colors many times over: “In a work of Art it is not fine tints that are required but Fine Forms, Fine Tints without, are loathsome. Fine Tints without Fine Forms are always the Subterfuge of the Blockhead” (E 571), and, more troubling, “there is no difference between Rafael's Cartoons and his Frescos, or Pictures, except that the Frescos, or Pictures, are more finished” (E 549). Apparently Raphael's “fine tints” were true to his “fine forms,” his coloring or finishing extending instead of distorting the work's foundation. Nevertheless, Blake's comments about finishing having no substantial effect on foundation contradict the idea that every line or mark was intended and significant, and they reinforce the idea that the most decisive stage in painting was not coloring but deciding what to admit to the work's final form—which, paradoxically, was synonymous with building the work's foundation. Blake's comments about finishing and foundation raise these questions: Were plate image and illuminated print analogous to cartoon and fresco, with the print's meaning dependent on its foundation (that is, the image as delineated on the plate) instead of its coloring and finishing, on its beginning rather than its end? Does Blake's subordination of finishing to line, in other words, imply that illuminated books had ideal forms impervious to the changes that occurred through production?

Blake's 1793 prospectus intimates the role coloring played in the conception of illuminated books. He defines illuminated printing as a “method of Printing both Letter-press and Engraving in a



style more *ornamental, uniform, and grand*, than any before discovered” (E 692, my emphasis). The ultimate source for Blake's description appears to be Joshua Reynolds's well-known response to William Gilpin's theory of the picturesque, which was published in 1792 in Gilpin's *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (35). Blake quoted Reynolds approvingly years later in an 1802 letter to Thomas Butts: ““You are certainly right in saying that Variety of Tints & Forms is Picturesque: but it must be remembered on the other hand; that the reverse of this (*uniformity of Colour & a long continuation of lines*) produces Grandeur”” (E 718-719). Blake underlined Reynolds's parenthetical statement apparently to validate his own painting style, which consisted of flat, minimally modeled washes over pencil lines strengthened and unified in pen and ink. Blake, however, disagreed with Reynolds's definition of “ornament.” Reynolds associated “ornament” with the Venetian style of coloring, in contrast to the “grand” style of the Florentine's. He believed that “the union of the two may make a sort of composite style” (71), an idea Blake thoroughly dismissed: “There is No Such Thing as A Composite Style” (E 652). For Blake, “ornamental” depended “altogether...on Distinctness of Form. The Venetian ought not to be calld the Ornamental Style” (E 651). Blake associated “ornament” with the grand and uniform style, a link thin Blake appears to have made as early as 1793. [12]

Illuminated prints, then, are “ornamental” in that their coloring is part of the print's original form and meaning and not mere “decoration” or something *added* to principles. They are “grand” in the sense that the long printed line dominates the design. They are “uniform” in the double sense of being printed from metal plates and covered in unbroken and evenly laid-in washes. [13] When Blake wrote his prospectus, he had printed over sixty copies of *Innocence, Thel, Marriage, Visions, and America*; he would have known that what remained uniform, in addition to the unchanging printed line, was the *style* of coloring and not the individual placement of colors or ornamental flourishes. [14] A concept of uniformity that permits variation suggests that coloring was itself an integral part of conception but that variants of the kind we have been discussing were of little consequence, or at least they were not intended to make each copy of an edition a new version of the book or each impression an independent drawing.

While visual differences among copies are believed to signify unique production and revision, *difference* (that is, the idea of difference) is believed to be ideologically significant. As noted, Erdman

states that it reveals a “loth[ing]” of “monotony” (*IB* 15); McGann claims that it was “part of Blake's artistic project” to make “each of his works *be* unique” (“Text” 275). Essick argues that it signifies “Blake consciously violat[ing]” the “mechanization, efficiency, and uniformity” or “conventional tastes and methods of production,” “a revolt against empire, against the hegemony of machine over man” (“Preludium” 6). Although Essick's opinion has changed, his initial assessment was deeply influential. [15] Illuminated printing came to be interpreted as an “artistic practice significantly in opposition to historically dominant modes of artistic production” (Carr 183), a practice that was “partly designed as an artistic escape from . . . narrow commercial anxieties (Eaves, “Machine” 63) and “in deliberate defiance of [Blake's] period's normal avenues of publication” (McGann, *Critique* 44). Indeed, the idea that “Blake's methods of engraving and copperplate printing purposefully set themselves apart from industrially-determined print technologies” is now, as the Santa Cruz Blake Study Group recognized, “commonly believed.” From this “fact,” the study group infers that Blake's “practice may even have constituted an active critique or subversion of what Walter Benjamin has called the age of mechanical reproduction, anticipating Brecht's combined aesthetic and ideological insistence on exhibiting—rather than hiding—the means of producing the artistic effect” (“Type” 323). It is in this light that Stewart Crehan can define illuminated printing as a “rebellion against the artistic dominance of the aristocracy and commercial bourgeoisie,” its production motivated primarily by “the historical need to transform the conditions within which art was produced,” and illuminated books as a socio-aesthetic as well as manifesting the political “struggle to transform the relation of artistic production in favour of the creative artisan” (241). [16]

But to what exactly are illuminated prints and books being compared? What were the “historically dominant modes of artistic production,” the “industrially-determined print technologies,” and the “normal avenues of publication”? They seem little other than the graphic *ideal*, whether in the form of letterpress printing or commercial line engraving, in which images are repeated exactly and labor is divided among various hands. Indeed, according to Carr, “the logic of mechanical reproduction is one of identity: it leads to a multiplication of the same, to a mass publication of what are taken to be identical copies” (182). At first the contrast between illuminated printing and conventional modes of production seems justified, given that Blake likened William Woollett's engravings to machines: “A

Machine is not a Man nor a Work of Art[;] it is Destructive of Humanity & of Art” (E 575). With the competition so defined, illuminated prints do indeed stand out and seem heroically alone. But the contrast breaks down when examined closely. First, variation—in the form of states, proofs, prints before letters, size and type of paper, and so on—was inherent to the aesthetics and economics of conventional print production. As Essick has demonstrated with Blake's own engraving of William Hogarth's *Beggar's Opera, Act III*, the “history of a reproductive engraving reveals the same differential pattern as the multilayered production of variation in Blake's unconventional etchings. The differences are in emphasis and detail, not in the nature of the phenomenon, and in our tendency to consider its presence in copy engravings as a matter of ‘mere connoisseurship’ (to use Carr's Phrase) while granting great consequence to the same processes in Blake’s work” (“How Blake's Body Means,” 201). Second, Blake himself did not contrast illuminated printing with engraving. In the prospectus he announces that “two large highly finished engravings” were also available and that two more were in progress, which suggests that he believed that engraving was like illuminated printing in that it too provided the means to “propagate such works as have wholly absorbed the Man of Genius,” in this particular sense “the Labours of the Artist” (E 692). While illuminated printing incorporated the work of the painter and poet with that of the printmaker or engraver, it was not engraving's contrary. Each was appropriate for the job asked of it. Third, Blake did not criticize engraving per se, but the idea that engravings were reproductive only, a self-fulfilling and self-limiting perception that rendered him a mere craftsman. With engraving and painting both grounded in drawing, hierarchical structuring of the two arts made no sense. The inherently artistic value of engraving, however did not mean reproductions were unnecessary (Blake himself treasured the reproductions after Raphael and Michaelangelo), but that they too, like original engravings, should display the “firmness of a Masters Touch,” like that of James Basire, his teacher and a master reproductive engraver, and not the “undecided bungling” that marks the mechanical labor of a journeyman (E 575). It is the latter style of engraving, represented by Woollett, that Blake attacks.

But what exactly was Woollett's crime? He produced engravings in the best tonal manner of the day, in the style of the Rubens and LeBrun gallery prints that George Michael Moser showed Blake, and in opposition to the “Hard Stiff & Dry Unfinished Works of Art” of Blake's heroes, Darer and Raimondi. Blake told Moser: “These things that you call Finishd are not Even Begun how can they then,

be Finishd? The Man who does not know The Beginning, never can know the End of Art” (E 639). [17] The “beginning,” as in foundation, was line, which was also its “end” in that line was not obscured by color or tone. “End” also referred to purpose, and the purpose of art was to articulate effectively and clearly the artist's imagination. For Blake, the imagination was manifest in outline and not brushwork, for the latter appealed to the sensual at the expense of the intellectual eye. The absence, then, of firmly decided line was a sign of bungling, indolence, or indecision, was the formulaic labor of a craftsman and not the execution of a master.

This connection between Woollett's engraving style and the Dutch and Venetian painting styles is problematic, for while the latter painting styles cause “every thing in Art [to] become a Machine” (E 547), they in fact show far more of the artist's hand; that is, they exhibit more of “the means of producing the artistic effect” than Blake's own painting style or the Florentine style he emulated. This overt exhibition of the means of production is why Reynolds ranked the Venetian below the Florentine: it addressed primarily the senses rather than the intellect. According to Reynolds, “the great end of [painting] is to strike the imagination. The Painter is therefore to make no ostentation of the means by which this is done; the spectator is only to feel the result in his bosom. An inferior artist is unwilling that any part of his industry should be lost upon the spectator. He takes as much pains to discover, as the greater artist does to conceal, the marks of his subordinate assiduity” (59). More concisely still he writes: “Tintoret, Paul Veronese, and others of the Venetian school, seem to have painted with no other purpose than to be admired for their skill and expertness in the mechanism of painting, and to make a parade of that art, which as I before observed, the higher stile requires its followers to conceal” (63). It was an observation Reynolds made many times over: “Young minds are indeed too apt to be captivated by this splendour of stile; and that of the Venetians is particularly pleasing” because it gives “pleasure to the eye or sense” (64). [18]

Reynolds equates an overt style of execution with execution itself, which is partly why he safeguards the intellectual integrity of invention by separating it from execution. Blake, on the other hand, while agreeing with Reynolds's devaluation of indistinct form and his idea of painting's primary purpose, believed that associating execution with the Venetian and Dutch painting styles was to “prostitute” the concept (E 652). For Blake, true execution was inseparable from invention, hence it

needed to be differentiated from mere labor. Dutch and Venetian paintings were essentially sketches, mere “blots & blurs” overlabored in colors and finished with loaded brushes, which necessarily rendered form indistinct and showed more of the artist's hand or means of production than did the “grand style” (E 576). Blake derides the loaded brush, asserting that those who equate painting with the “Pant Brush” live in “the house of Rembrant” (E 515). “Pant,” which Blake repeats three times, suggests labored breath and exhaustion as opposed to inspiration and decisiveness. [19] It follows that Blake should deride the engraving style that attempts to imitate these features, the style of Woollett and Robert Strange: “The Labourd Works of Journeymen employed by Correggio. Titian Veronese & all the Venetians ought not to be shewn to the Young Artist as the Works of original Conception any more than the Engravings of Strange Bartolozzi [and] Woollett . . . [they] are Works of Manual Labour” (E 644). [20] By equating these graphic and pictorial styles, Blake implies that the paintings are no more original than reproductive engravings; both styles are formulaic and could be executed by anyone trained in that style, “by What all can do Equally well” (E 573). These kinds of engravings and paintings, which represent “high finishd Ignorance” and “Mental Weakness,” as well as “endless labour”—labor without end, or purpose, and continued beyond what was necessary (E 573, 548)—are poor examples for art students precisely because they are labored; that is, they show too readily the hand of the artist, either literally in the form of brush work or metaphorically in the virtuoso handling of a complex and illusionistic line system (Landseer 138). [21]

We cannot use Blake's criticism of labor and mechanical form to support the position that Blake abhorred the mechanical and favored exhibiting the means of production since by “mechanical” he is referring to works that call attention to themselves, that overtly show the “means of producing artistic effects.” As revealed by his firm belief in inspiration and the primacy of an artist's first thoughts, Blake advocated the aesthetic of the sketch, but his attacks on “blots and blurs” reveal that he abhorred the indistinctness of its various forms, believing that art engaged the imagination through subject and theme and not through handling. [22] It is not that Blake failed to show his hand in illuminated printing: books color printed, through the impasto-like effects of the ink and paint, are reminiscent of *alla prima* painting, and white-line etching, woodcut-on-pewter, and the Virgil wood engravings were executed with tools clearly reflecting the body's motion and thereby calling attention to the medium. While color

prints are in effect imitations of paintings, the experimental graphics are neither imitations nor translations but images unique to their medium. To have made them so is essentially to have put into practice Landseer's argument for elevating the status of engraving: engraving is aesthetically valuable because its language is unique, a truth hidden by its own film of familiarity (138ff). In these more experimental graphics Blake seems intent on confronting the viewer, on defamiliarizing the print. But all of these startling visual effects were created after 1788, and thus they do not reflect Blake's intentions for inventing illuminated printing or his early use of it, nor do these effects signal a change in Blake's intentions or signify a desire to overthrow graphic convention, since the world of graphic art was far more inclusive and eclectic than the simple contrast between Woollett's style of engraving and illuminated printing suggests. Indeed, as Landseer's survey of the age's new (and presumably "industrially-determined") print technologies demonstrates, graphic art was anything but monolithic and conventions were everywhere breaking down.

The abiding taste was not for things mechanical, efficient, and uniform, but for proofs, facsimiles of drawings, and color and colored prints. According to *The Artist's Repository*, etchings "executed by painters are seldom anything further advanced than by aqua-fortis; and herein [we] discover the master's hand and facility of design, which is their merit" (2:18-19). Hand-colored etchings, like Thomas Rowlandson's caricature prints, which Blake noted in 1799 ought not to be as popular as they were (E 704, 702), along with aquatints and the "soft blending and infantile indefinity" of stipple and chalk engraving, had become the "rage" (Landseer 126). These techniques were stimulated by the taste for drawings and sketches, including the "rough sketches" that had become "the prevailing tide of fashion" by 1793 (Craig 5-6). Aquatint, which Gilpin used to reproduce his "rough sketches," had become "the principle process employed in book illustrations" between 1790 and 1830 (Hardie 87; see also Prideaux). [23] From a purist aesthetic, unfinished etching and color and colored prints were abominations as offensive as aquatint's and stipple's obliteration of firm outlines (Landseer 180; *Book*, chaps. 13 and 14). [24] In effect, to applaud illuminated printing as "an active critique or subversion of what Walter Benjamin has called the age of mechanical reproduction" (Santa Cruz 323), or a "rebellion against the artistic dominance of the aristocracy and commercial bourgeoisie" (Crehan 241), is essentially to applaud Blake for not being a graphic purist at a time when few purists were left.

Illuminated printing appears politically significant partly because *innovation* per se is defined as a deliberate break with established practice. When Blake's innovations are defined technically and placed historically, however, illuminated printing can be seen to share many of the aesthetic aims of techniques that were then becoming established precisely because they were meeting the demands of a commercial bourgeoisie. In other words, Blake was joining an argument—and endorsing, reinterpreting, and rejecting the various ideological positions underlying that argument—rather than starting one, joining a growing print market that included the “legitimate artist” and the many “empirical pretenders” (Landseer 138), line engravings as well as monochrome, colored, and color chalk engravings, stipples, aquatints, etchings, mezzotints, and now “a method of Printing both Letter-press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand, than any before discovered” (E 692). His designs were drawn in firm outline with pens and brushes, and the plates were printed in colors and/or the impressions were hand colored with an assistant. Illuminated prints are exactly as J. T. Smith described them: impressions “printed in any tint” so that Blake “or Mrs. Blake [could] colour the marginal figures up by hand in imitation of drawings” (Bentley, *Blake Records* 460). The difference between illuminated printing and other techniques that sought to imitate drawings is that the brush and pen marks in the former were actually created by pens and brushes and not, as in the latter, imitated with metal instruments and indirect processes (e.g., aquatint). [25] And even then the differences were not absolute. Creating dark areas directly as positive pen and brush marks was possible in a variation of aquatint called sugar-lift aquatint, the method used by Thomas Gainsborough in the early 1780s to reproduce a few of his pen-and-ink drawings and by Alexander Cozens to reproduce “blots” in *New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscapes* (1784). The image is drawn on the plate with pens and brushes using an ink mixed with sugar. The design is covered with a thin ground and immersed in water, which causes the sugar in the ink to swell and break through the ground, thereby leaving the autographic gestures of pen and brush as positive shapes. The method is perfectly analogous to illuminated printing, except that the design is given an aquatint ground and is etched in intaglio. Its similarity to illuminated printing suggests that Blake and Gainsborough were responding to the same aesthetic and possibly commercial forces (as was Alois Senefelder when he invented lithography then known as “polyautography”), and not necessarily that Blake knew of the



earlier method. [26]

“Artistic effect,” like difference, appears to be a “radical” aspect of illuminated printing when examined outside its historical and technical context. Other kinds of prints, however, particularly colored and color prints, were also “radical” in the sense that they varied one from the other and showed the “master's hand and facility of design.” Instead of perceiving illuminated printing as a *reaction against*—or an effort to *reject*—“conventional taste” or the “commercial bourgeoisie,” we need to see in it Blake's desire to tap into a market created by the status quo's demand for drawings, a market actively supplied by commercial and original printmakers. Illuminated prints exhibit “the means of producing the artistic effect” because they were printed and colored by hand in an age that placed great value on color prints and autographic gestures. Like etchings and facsimiles of sketches, they move toward the simple and spontaneous, toward drawing, and away from the overtly skillful performance characteristic of reproductive engraving. But this move away from the reproductive ideal does not make them “subversive,” except to purists like John Landseer; indeed, to collectors of the day, illuminated prints may have represented Blake at his most fashionable. [27]

While the combination of word and image is the most obvious feature of illuminated printing, it appears to have been suggested by the possibilities of the technique and not the impetus for the technique's invention. Relief etching appears to have been invented to reproduce drawings, or, at any rate, the *Approach of Doom*, a pen-and-ink-wash drawing executed by Blake's brother Robert, appears to have been the first work executed in the new technique (see *Book*, chap. 20). This production, which presumably answered Blake's desire to publish original images in general and to imitate wash drawings in particular, revealed through the association of pen and ink with writing the potential of relief etching to reproduce words—at which time the idea for illuminated printing and poetry was born. While the full technical and aesthetic origin of relief etching and illuminated printing cannot be examined here, suffice it to say that illuminated printing evolved out of a preexistent technique and was not invented to realize a preexistent form, the illuminated book, or a political agenda, the overthrowing of conventional modes of book production. The idea for illuminated books, in other words, did not determine the technique; assuming that it did is yet another example of assuming that invention precedes execution. That Blake invented and used a graphic technique modeled on drawing, in process and in appearance, and that he

chose to use it to publish poetry is no doubt ideologically significant, both to him, in that it appears to have supplied the grounds for an aesthetic theory advocating the unity of invention and execution, and to us, in that it illuminates the contemporaneity and context of his experiments. Nevertheless, defining exactly what those ideological positions were and how they were manifested is difficult. The use of a technique (as opposed to style) is not necessarily synonymous with the rejection of another technique, at least not from an artist's point of view, though it may indeed become that (e.g., Blake's early use of water-based paint did not express a hatred of oil paint). Its use depends more on its appropriateness to the project at hand than on an aversion to alternatives, on reasons that are more practical, economic, and aesthetic than overtly political. Moreover, we must be careful about ascribing undue significance to Blake's undertaking all stages of illuminated printing. First, Blake's control over production was not as complete as imagined, given the nature of the technique and Mrs. Blake's assistance in printing and coloring impressions. Second, even if it were, it would not necessarily be politically significant or signify a desire to escape the division of labor characteristic of commercial graphics or letterpress printing. This is because an artist (as opposed to a writer) accustomed to controlling all stages of labor in the production of original prints—whether the prints are engravings like *Job* or etchings like *Albion rose*—is not really varying his practice or controlling more of his labor by using a new technique or by producing prints with words. It only seems so when the process is approached from the perspective of book publishing instead of printmaking and drawing. This is not to say that Blake failed to perceive and discuss illuminated printing symbolically, but only to point out that the technique was not invented to realize a desire to control his own labor or all aspects of an artwork, let alone to provide analogies, symbols, and metaphors for later poems.

The facts that Blake owned his own press, produced original images in various graphic techniques, controlled images from beginning to end, and perceived graphic art as being equal to painting and drawing, that is, as sharing in the same "end" or purpose of "Art," are ideologically significant precisely because they reflect an idea of printmaking not widely shared. But if the signature in the first state of *Albion rose* is "WB inv 1780," as it is in the second state, then Blake's radical approach to and perception of graphic art was probably already in place when he invented relief etching in 1788, even if it was not much practiced. [28] That he, a professional engraver, exhibited watercolors

at the Royal Academy in 1784 and 1785 indicates that he perceived himself as both artist and printmaker, the necessary prerequisite for producing original prints. Blake's eyes were already open to the possibilities of using graphic art creatively; that is to say Blake's idea of graphic art in general, and not of illuminated printing in particular, was the “dramatic break” with “the engraving and printing conventions of his time” (Essick, *Prinmaker* 255). Essick has argued that “in the early 1780s, Blake attempted to fulfill his expectations as an artist and poet through the normal channels of publication. Failure in this endeavor” led to this break and to “the invention of relief etching” (255). Given Blake's ambitions after leaving Basire's shop, this seems like a fair assessment of events, even though there is no documentary evidence to prove that Blake tried to publish poetry through normal channels at this time. [29] I am suggesting that illuminated poetry evolved out of relief etching, which was itself generated by Blake's desire to produce original prints in imitation of drawings—or rather to produce original drawings in metal—as well as to supplement his income. The technique broke less dramatically from graphic conventions than it first appears because it was an extension of an idea of printmaking that was already in effect and because it joined other techniques that shared some of its practical, if not also theoretical, objectives.

We must also be careful before interpreting self-publication as evidence that Blake “was plainly aspiring to become a literary institution unto himself” (McGann, *Critique* 47), or to “make him[self] independent of publishers as well as of patrons, so that he could achieve personal independence as both poet and painter at a single blow” (Frye 120), or that “Blake clearly had high hopes that ‘Illuminated printing’ would make his fortune” (Mitchell *Composite* 42). First, one cannot assume that this was Blake's intention when one also assumes that he printed illuminated books one at a time, since the latter assumption means that production costs for books like *Innocence*, which was advertised for five shillings in 1793, could not be recouped for many years. Second, such interpretations are suspect because they merely echo Alexander Gilchrist's romanticized notions of artist and production. Blake lists in the prospectus six illuminated books, priced between 3s. and 10s.6d. apiece, along with two engravings and two “small book[s] of Engravings” (E 693). Gilchrist apparently believed that the prospectus signaled a financial turning point. He assumed that the illuminated books provided Blake with the “principle means of support through his future life” (1:69). Bentley corrects this assumption,

noting that Blake may have “earned L600 with them, not counting expenses—perhaps six years' income for thirty-eight years' work” (*Blake Records* 33 n. 1). But even this sum is far too generous, since approximately 75 percent of Blake's stock, or 125 illuminated books (counting copies of *Innocence* and *Experience* that were initially produced or issued separately) of 168 extant or known copies of illuminated books (discounting the broadsheets of *On Homers Poetry* and the *Ghost of Abel*), were produced between 1789 and 1795 and probably sold at the prices nearer those listed in the prospectus of 1793 than in the letter to Dawson Turner in 1818 (see *Book*, chaps. 31, 33, and the appendix). [30] By the time of the prospectus, Blake had produced twenty-two copies of *Innocence* (see *Book*, chap. 24). At five shillings a copy, *Innocence* would secure a larger audience and reputation than income. The total income that Blake could have realized from *Innocence* in 1793 was L5.10s., minus the approximately L1.1s the book probably cost to produce. [31] The income from the forty or so copies of the other five books advertised in the prospectus would have realized under seventeen pounds. The total value of his stock of books in 1793, in other words, was the equivalent of about forty impressions of the *Job* and *Edward and Elinor* engravings (at 12s. and 10s.6d. respectively), or the labor required to engrave just one medium-size separate plate for the publishers—which was the equivalent of about three month's income. [32] Blake also notes in the prospectus that his technique produced books at one-fourth the cost of conventional modes of publication, which was probably true, but not because it was more efficient than letterpress. Blake did not pay for labor, manuscripts, or designs. No doubt his boast was made to encourage sales, indicating that *Innocence*, for example, was actually worth one pound, a sign that his hand-printed and hand-colored octavo-size book of poems, with only “25 designs,” was indeed both deluxe and rare and a real steal at the price.

Mitchell has suggested that “Blake was never able to mass-produce his books as he hoped, partly because the new method was not so easy as he supposed, and partly because ‘republican art’ was in the 1790s a dangerous commodity” (*Composition* 43). But did Blake ever hope or expect to make his fortune by mass-producing his books? In 1793 Blake knew the strengths and weaknesses of his method, he knew the size of his stock, and he knew how to add. While he no doubt hoped to earn some money as well as reputation, he must also have realized that illuminated printing, no matter how large and varied the stock, even after the costs of copper plates were recouped, could never have provided a

dependable source of income at the prices he was charging, that its profits would always be supplemental to income derived from painting, designing, and engraving. If Blake truly believed that illuminated printing would “deliver [him] from his perennial poverty and obscurity,” then, ironically, as Paul Mann concludes, Blake's “private technologies” appear to have hindered rather than helped, in that his failure to secure a large audience resulted from the limited capability of the technologies, from his working outside the “social machinery of production,” and ultimately from “his project's own inexorable aesthetic and economic self-absorption” (“Apocalypse” 8-9, 22). But how large was Blake's envisioned audience? The “numerous great works now in hand” (E 693) and which had been produced by that date amounted to as many as seventy-four copies of seven titles (including eight copies of *Experience*, which was advertised but not yet printed). This is not many books from the perspective of conventional publishing, but it is a goodly number for a cottage industry and especially from the perspective of a painter. Blake appears to have advertised primarily to connoisseurs, collectors, and other artists, all of whom, like Flaxman, Romney, Humphrey, and Blake himself, collected books, paintings, and prints. Basically, this is the same audience he sought for his watercolors, which by nature were usually unique and stored in portfolios or hung in parlors of private homes. From the perspective of the watercolorist, then, edition printing ensured that a set of particular works would have a larger-than-usual audience, “sufficient,” he told Turner in 1818, to have gained a “reputation as an Artist which was the chief thing Intended” (E 771). [33]

Even if Blake had somehow grossly deceived himself regarding the financial benefits of his new mode of printing, it is still mistaken to imply that he somehow “sold out” later on, when he began charging higher prices. To interpret Blake's burgeoning awareness through William Hayley that “The Profits arising from Publications are immense” and Blake's hope “to commence publication with many very formidable works” (E 726) as a rejection of or a “swerv[ing] from his early radical project,” and thus somehow a capitulation to the very “commercial system of his own day . . . from which [he] early sought to gain his independence” (McGann, *Critique* 45, 44), is to ignore a crucial fact of edition printing. The production of numerous copies of the same illuminated book was motivated not by numerous single commissions but by a desire to build stock and hence by the very practical reasons of realizing “profits” (even if they were supplemental) and of securing an audience, however limited in

size. [34] When Blake returned to printing illuminated books in 1818, printing ten copies of six titles, he produced fewer works per printing session, but the books were priced as series of colored prints or paintings and had the potential to add substantially to Blake's declining income (see *Book*, chap. 33). Even so, these late printing sessions seem to have been motivated by at least one commission, apparently used to finance the production of other titles. In other words, inferring Blake's motivation for early production sessions from that for late ones is as fallacious as inferring his early practice from his late practice and statements. At the time of the prospectus and for the next two years, Blake used the technique of illuminated printing not because he hoped or expected to make his fortune but because it was appropriate to his temperament and vision, and, as Smith states, it enabled him to avoid the “expense of letterpress” (Bentley, *Blake Records* 460). Moreover, because Blake’s initial investment per book was minimal, he did not require a large audience to make a profit unlike the far more expensive self-publication projects of the 1790s (see Bentley, “Great Illustrated-Book” 61-62). On the other hand, this profit was so small that the early editions of illuminated books appear to have been financed by Blake's earnings as a commercial engraver.

If illuminated impressions were grouped according to editions or printing sessions, then one would see that changes of printing ink indicate issues of an edition and that colors, despite being placed differently, were the same and applied in the same manner. Instead of being *exactly* repeatable, such impressions are slight variants of one another, forcing us to ask: Is a raw sienna copy of *Visions* heavier than a yellow ochre copy? Is a pink Theotorman in *Visions* plate 7 warmer than a green one? Is a blue one sadder or more contrite than a yellow one? Was the change in robe color motivated by something other than Blake thinking he already had enough pink and green Theotormons? Was it even Blake's decision? Indeed, had the same colors always been placed exactly the same, the job of coloring would have been tedious for the Blakes and would have taken longer to finish than coloring freely or even in loose imitation of a model supplied by Blake. Jonathan Richardson's comment about how true artists copy models, whether other drawings or nature, is relevant: “Every man will naturally and unavoidably mix something of himself in all he does if he copies with any degree of liberty: If he attempts to follow his original servilely and exactly, that cannot but have a stiffness which will easily distinguish what is so done from what is performed naturally, easily, and without restraint” (Richardson 230; also quoted in

Rogers 1:72). [35] In other words, variations among an edition's copies cannot be read as revisions, for they are technically, aesthetically, and psychologically inevitable among an edition of impressions colored by artists, rather than by colorists hired to wash prints systematically and strictly according to the artist's prototype—and even there variations are inevitable. [36]

While Blake knew that his process produced variations necessarily, the abstract object of “variation” was not in itself Blake's primary intention. His intention when printing and reprinting was, as he told Turner to “take care that [the books] shall be done at least as well as any I have yet Produced” (E 771). As noted, the Blakes were not graphic purists; they were not interested in making an edition's copies look exactly the same, but neither were they interested in making them look completely different. The technical evidence demonstrates that Blake was far more catholic than a purist like Landseer and far more practical and efficient in his printmaking than has been heretofore imagined. He may not have been a very good businessman, professional in the manner of Boydell, Bartolozzi, or Woollett, but then neither is the average professional in any field.

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## NOTES

[\*] *Essays on Romanticism*. Eds. Karl Kroeber and Gene Ruoff. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993. 63-87.

[1] Lily Zimmermann, describing Songs of Innocence and Experience copy BB for Christie's Newsletter (November 1988), summarizes these assumptions concisely: "Because Blake made the engravings and printed the copies of Songs himself, it was an expensive and time-consuming project. He could not afford to produce these illuminated books except upon individual order for his private customers" (4).

[2] For a detailed analysis of edition printing and coloring and Mrs. Blake's role in these processes, see my *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, chaps. 12, 14, and 16, forthcoming from Princeton University Press and referred to as *Book* throughout this article.

[3] For similar comparisons, see Myra Glazer and Gerda Norvig's essay, "Blake's Book of Changes: On Viewing Three Copies of the Songs of *Innocence and of Experience*," which Carr thinks is "the best reading of the subtle changes in illumination from version to version" (185 n. 9).

Although he approached the issue with slightly different assumptions about production, Essick reached similar conclusions regarding the meaning of differences among illuminated prints and books, that they do not necessarily reflect revision but are the inevitable result of Blake's mode of production. His articles on the subject ought to be read by any one interested in reading Blake's illuminated books. See "Materials," "Teaching the Variations in Songs," and "How Blake's Body Means." This last article is a penetrating response to Carr's "Illuminated Printing: Toward a Logic of Difference." Both works are in Hilton and Vogler's *Unnam'd Forms*.

[4] Carr associates difference in illuminated books with Derrida's *differànce* and believes that "variations . . . help to define the conditions of representation within illuminated printing. They point to an ongoing, open-ended production of meanings rather than a re-presentation of an original meaning" (Carr 190). For a discussion about whether Derrida's concept has been adequately understood by Carr and other critics, see Dan Miller's review of *Unnam'd Forms*.

[5] The idea that Blake "loathed monotony" cannot be inferred from variation among illuminated prints. It could be argued that Blake agreed with Reynolds that monotony was a feature of the grand style. Reynolds stated that "grandeur of effect" can be produced "by making the colours very distinct and forcible, such as we see in those of Rome and Florence," where the absence of chiaroscuro or modulation of colors makes "simplicity . . . the presiding principle . . . Certainly, nothing can be more simple than monotony; and the distinct blue, red, and yellow . . . have that effect of grandeur which was intended" (61). Blake responded, "These are Fine & Just Notions" (E 650).

[6] From a letter of 31 March 1922 to Bernard Quaritch, the bookdealer, shown to me by G. E. Bentley, Jr. The printability of an adequately etched relief plate depended on ink being properly made, on the

plate being properly inked, and on the dabber being handled skillfully. As ink splatters in illuminated impressions evince, even shallows relatively deep will be blemished if the surface is poorly inked. By conventional standards then or now, such impressions would be considered poor. In fact, impressions were said to be “either good or bad, according to the truth with which they represent the work on the plate: if they are too faint, or too full, they are equally bad; the first being deficient in force, the latter in clearness; which two qualities ought to unite in a perfect impression” (*Artist's Repository* 4:102). Yet in illuminated printing poorly inked impressions, which are by no means rare, do not signify an unskilled hand, the work of Mrs. Blake, or a failure of the inking tool. They signify at the least that Blake was less fastidious than his contemporaries and at most was willing to redefine the acceptable in graphic art.

[7] While Carr and I may disagree about what constitutes a significant variant. I believe we are both trying, as Carr notes, “to direct attention to graphic qualities of illuminated pages too often ignored or dismissed” and that to do this necessarily means our having “to rethink and redefine our critical and editorial procedures” (191 n. 12).

Despite his claim that the subtlest changes in the verbal-visual sign system are “radical,” significant, and deliberated (182), Carr’s main example of a significant variation is *representational* and not at all dependent on comparisons with other copies of itself or on its difference from the plate image. He correctly notes that the adult figure in “The Little Boy found” appears female in some copies and male in others and that such difference is not explained by Blake's supposed preference for an androgynous Christ (194). At issue, as Carr notes, is the validity of critical systems of interpretation that predetermine meaning and refuse to acknowledge variations or versions in favor of an ideal text. He is right that different gender (like race in “The Little Black Boy”) could make for different versions of the poem, since in the one the figure functions naturalistically and in the other symbolically. Knowing the modes and dates of production, the editor can ask: were impressions with the male and female features printed in the same session? Were they colored by Blake and/or Mrs. Blake?

[8] Blake worked on versions of the *Last Judgment* from 1806 to the end of his life. A watercolor version commissioned by the countess of Egremont in 1807 was the subject of a letter to Ozias Humphry, of which three drafts are extant (Keynes, *Letters* 131-135). Another watercolor version (ca. 1809) corresponds to most but not all the details of the *Notebook* account, which raises the possibility that the description is of the untraced “fresco” (i.e., distempea) version that Blake was working on at the time of his death, and that he apparently had been working on for many years (see Butlin 2:639-648).

[9] “Working up Effect is more an operation of Indolence than the Making out of the Parts . . . I speak here of Rembrandts & Rubens & Reynolds's Effect.—For Real Effect. is Making out the Parts & it is Nothing Else but That” (E 639). For a discussion of Blake's drawing style, its relation to sketching, and his views of sketches and “first thoughts,” see *Book* chap. 4.

[10] The idea that Art involves the conscious and deliberate organization of imprecise markings is suggested as early as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), by Reason's building or ideas supplied by Desire and by its being the circumference of energy (plates 6, 4).

[11] Mellor, for example, argues that Blake chose his linear style because it was the most appropriate for communicating mental images to others (237). That line was always philosophically important to Blake, and especially so after 1800 (see Paley), is not in question; that its meaning or use was predicated on the nature of his mental images rather than vice versa, is questionable.

[12] In the prospectus Blake also states that his technique “exceeds in elegance all former methods” (E 692). According to Reynolds, “The Venetian is indeed the most splendid of the schools of elegance” (67), to which Blake responded: “Vulgarity & not Elegance—The Word Elegance ought to be applied to Forms. not to Colours” (E 652).

[13] According to Reynolds, “to give a general air of grandeur at first view, all trifling or artful play of little lights, or an attention to a variety of tints is to be avoided; a quietness and simplicity must reign over the whole work; to which a breadth of uniform, and simple colour, will very much contribute” (61). Essick has defined “uniform” as signifying the work of a single mind (*William Blake, Printmaker* 119). In light of Mrs. Blake's participation in the production process, this sense of the word is probably inaccurate.

[14] If extant work represents the complete printing runs, then by the time of the prospectus Blake had produced eleven copies of *America*, thirteen copies of *Thel*, twenty-two copies of *Innocence*, four copies of *Marriage*, five copies of *Gate of Paradise*, and eleven copies of *Visions*, and he was about to print eight copies of *Experience* (See *Book*, chaps. 24-28).

[15] More recently, Essick argues that variation is not a “conscious violation” of the norm but the inevitable result of Blake’s mode of production (“Materials” 859), a result intentionally not suppressed but rather encouraged and taken creative advantage of (*William Blake and the Language of Adam* 190). As noted, Blake was not so obsessed with clean copy to be much bothered with “Spots & Blemishes[,] which are beauties and not faults” (E 576).

[16] See also Phillips, who defines illuminated printing as a “rebellion against conventional printing and publishing” (“Manuscript Draft” 35-36 and again in “Songs” 220-221); Eason, who believes illuminated printing was motivated by Blake's desire to escape the “divisions . . . between author, illustrator, engraver, printer, and publisher” characteristic of conventional book production (35); and Essick, who had argued that the “rugged lineation in the illuminated books” was “one result of Blake's reaction to reproductive engravings” (“Traditions” 66). From a postmodernist view, graphic difference could be thought even to represent the cultural or psychic diversity reason seeks to repress in its desire for order and uniformity (see McGowan 6, 207). For the view that Blake was “a small-scale entrepreneur,” an artist who “incarnates the marriage of neoclassicism and the nascent Industrial Revolution” in positive and creative ways and whose “notion of a graphic cutting edge was identified in his mind with craft and industry” see chapter 4 of Boime's fine historically grounded analysis.

[17] George Michael Moser was the Keeper of the Royal Academy, and apparently one of “The Modern Chalcographic Connoisseurs & Amateurs [who] admire only the work of the journeyman Picking out of whites & blacks in what is calld Tints[;] they despise drawing which despises them in return. They see only whether every thing is coverd down but one spot of light” (E 577).

[18] Reynolds characterizes the Venetian manner as “a mere struggle without effect; *a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*,” and as having “debauch[ed] the young and inexperienced,” and “turn[ed] off the attention of the connoisseur and of the patron of art, as well as that of the painter, from those higher excellencies of which the art is capable” (64, 67).

[19] Blake responds with a firm “Nonsense” to Reynolds's claim “that the [paint brush] is the instrument by which . . . to obtain eminence” (E 646). Blake's opinion of flashy brush work is revealed most clearly in his attacks on Rosa: “Handling is Labour & Trick [,] Salvator Rosa employd Journeymen” (E 655), and “Salvator Rosa was precisely what he Pretended Not to be. his Pictures. are high Labourd pretensions to Expeditious Workmanship. He was the Quack Doctor of Painting His Roughnessess & Smoothnesses. are the Production of Labour & Trick. As to Imagination he was totally without Any” (E 654).

For Blake, Rosa's style of painting was analogous to the blot and blur drawing technique of Gilpin and Cozens, what Gilpin referred to as the “*bold and free manner*” (*Three Essays* 17): “free” refers to a stroke that has “no appearance of constraint. It is *bold*, when a part is given for the whole,

which it cannot fail of suggesting. This is the laconism of genius. But sometimes it may be free, and yet suggest only how easily a line, which means nothing, may be executed. Such a stroke is not *bold*, but *impudent*" (17). This last statement appears to have been a nod to Reynolds, who warned students to avoid the seduction of execution or mechanical felicity.

[20] Blake associated Woollett's practice with the Venetian and his own with the Florentine, although in fact Blake's style was far closer to Woollett's than to that of Italian Renaissance engravers like Raimondi or Ghisi (see Essick, *William Blake, Printmaker* 199ff). It was only late in his life, through the influence of Linnell, that Blake began to rethink his own graphic training and effect a style corresponding to his earlier theories. Dennis Read reminds us that Woollett and Strange were attacked in part because of their association with Cromek, who Blake believed had lied to him about engraving the *Grave* designs and stole his idea for the engraving of *Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims* (69ff). As Blake himself stated: "Resentment for Personal Injuries has had some share in this Public Address" (E 574).

[21] All prints, including line engravings, show the means of production, either the artist's through imitation (or facsimiles), the colorist's, or the printmaker's through translation. Indeed, the primary reason Landseer hated facsimiles was that they required the complete erasure of the graphic—or mechanical—code and thus the hand of the engraver. He abhorred color prints (impressions printed in colors) and colored prints (impressions colored by hand) most of all and for the same reason.

[22] Advocating the aesthetic of the sketch but not its form raises theoretical and technical problems for an artist committed to line, a stylistic feature associated with last thoughts and reason. Aesthetically, Blake needed to regroup neoclassical form on romantic concepts of imagination and vision, a theoretical regrouping thoroughly investigated by Eaves in *William Blake's Theory of Art*. It is manifest in Blake's assertion that invention and execution were inseparable, and in drawing style in which firm outlines are extensions of and not departures from first thoughts. For a discussion of these problems, see *Book*, chap. 4.

[23] Aquatint had become the medium of choice for the very popular books of picturesque and topographical views, starting with Sandby's *12 Views in Aquatinta from Drawings taken on the spot in South Wales* (1775). It was also used extensively in books of facsimiles, such as Rowlandson's *Imitations of Modern Drawings after Gainsborough, Sawrey Gilpin, and Others* (1784-1788).

[24] Landseer engraved in the style of Woollett, which he held as the paradigm. From Blake's perspective, this style seemed to subordinate line to tone and to dominate the print market. From Landseer's perspective, it was an overtly linear art losing the market to authentic tonal processes like stipple and aquatint.

[25] The dark shapes in aquatint are created by their being bitten longer in acid than the areas around them, which are "stopped out" with an acid-resistant varnish to prevent them from being etched. Thus, dark shapes are formed indirectly, whereas light shapes actually show the shape of the brush used to stop out.

[26] In addition to Blake and Gainsborough, Stubbs, Barry, Rowlandson, Mortimer, Crome, Cotman, and Sandby all produced original prints in small editions and with variations. In addition to Gainsborough and Cozens, John Hassell also used sugar lift. In fact, Hassell appears to have independently invented the technique in 1791, though he did not publish until 1811 his *Calcographia: or, the Art of Multiplying with Perfection, Drawings, after the Manner of Chalk, Black lead Pencil, and Pen and Ink*. On the title page Hassell reported having been "honoured with a Medal and Thirty Guineas by The Society of Arts etc. etc. etc." "Calcographia" was a technique that Hassell believed provided amateurs with the means of producing "fac similes" of their own works (27) and would induce "many of



our first rate artists to give to posterity their sketches” (title page). The engraver C. N. Cochin responded similarly to chalk engraving, which was invented in 1740 to reproduce chalk drawings: “At last it was possible for an amateur of a student, living in the remotest parts of the country, to copy drawings by the great Masters!” (quoted in Gross 152).

[27] Wordsworth's experiments in prosody reflect a similar move toward the simple and autographic. As Robert Mayo has argued, Wordsworth put to original and brilliant use material that had already become conventional. More significantly, Wordsworth was the first important poet to claim that these simple forms were *serious art*, an idea “subversive” and “radical” to those holding what he dismissed as preconceived notions of poetry, but an idea that obviously had an audience. Like most dialectics, like Lanseer's, Blake's, and our own, the one presented by Wordsworth in the Preface does not readily admit to grays.

[28] Only color-printed impressions of the first state are extant, and the signature is presumably obscured by the color printing (see Essick, *Separate Plates* 24-29).

[29] Blake's *Poetical Sketches* was published in 1783, but it appears to have been a project orchestrated by Blake's friends and not by Blake himself. But whether Blake encouraged or submitted to the project, it is important to note that twelve of the twenty-two extant copies seem to have been in Blake's possession, uncut and unstitched, at the time of his death, suggesting that “he did not show much interest” in the book (Bentley, *Blake Books* 346, 345). There is no documentary evidence that Blake sought out bookdealers to distribute or sell *Poetical Sketches*, or that he approached publishers with the new lyrical poems that were to become *Songs of Innocence*, at least three of which were included in *An Island in the Moon* (ca. 1784).

[30] The huge increase in the 1818 and 1827 prices relative to those of 1793 reflect a change in the idea of the book, from a book of poems to a book of painted prints. For example, the L3.3s. for *Innocence* in 1818 translates as approximately 2s.5d. per print, which was the average price for an octavo-sized hand-colored print according to print catalogues of Boydell, Macklin and other print dealers. We do not know when Blake began charging the higher prices; the earliest known example is 1806, when he sold *Songs* copy E to Thomas Butts for L6.6s. (Bentley, *Blake Books* 414).

[31] In *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, I estimate Blake's production costs per book by focusing primarily on the amount of paper and metal used per edition and their costs. What emerged was a pricing formula that was roughly the same as that used by conventional publishers: retail price about five times the cost of production (Gaskell 179; see *Book*, chap, 24).

[32] Blake received eighty pounds from Macklin to engrave *The Fall of Rosamond* after Stothard in 1783 (Bentley, *Blake Records* 569). In 1799 Blake told Trusler that his rate for engravings was thirty guineas (E 703). The idea that twenty-two pounds was equal to about three months' income is based on *The Book of Trades* of 1804, which notes that a copperplate printer earned forty shillings a week (116). An engraver's income would fluctuate more than a printer's, compositor's, or most others in the trade because the work was commissioned free-lance. It seems, though, that the Blakes would have required an average income of two pounds a week and that they averaged that from 1800 through 1810 (*Blake Records* 606).

[33] Actually, Blake says that “the few I have Printed & Sold are sufficient to have gained me great reputation,” and he describes illuminated books as “unprofitable enough” to him but “Expensive to the Buyer” (E 771). As *Book* chapter 16 points out, these statements, made twenty-five years after the prospectus and when Blake was just beginning to show interest in reprinting his early books—and when his financial situation had changed dramatically (see also chapter 33)—must be read carefully The



number of books produced and sold by 1818 was greater than implied (approximately 139 and 125 respectively), though that is not something Blake was likely to remember, and his reputation was probably smaller. Blake seems intent on convincing Turner, a Yorkshire banker and well-known collector, that the works that he inquired about were rare, beautiful, and fairly priced.

[34] One would not accuse Fuseli of such capitulation when he complained that he was tired of “contributing to make the public drop their gold into purses not my own” and planned “to lay hatch, and crack an egg for myself too” (Knowles 1:174-175), an egg that became the Milton Gallery. Indeed, it would have been surprising had Blake remained impervious to such ambition when so many of his friends were planning commercial projects and the illustrated book was in its golden period (see Boime, chap. 4; Bentley, “Great Illustrated-Book”).

[35] Sir George Beaumont says much the same: “The servile imitator seems to me to mistake the *body* for the *soul*; and will never touch the heart” (quoted in Gilpin, *Two Essays* 26).

[36] Coloring prints by hand will always produce variations unless stencils are used. The Manchester Etching Workshop's facsimiles of *Songs* copy B were handcolored, intentionally like their model, yet no two impressions are exactly alike since no two washes can be laid in exactly the same (see my “Recreating Blake”). The commercially colored copies of Blake's *Night Thoughts* demonstrate this as well. At least fourteen copies (colored ca. 1797) appear to be modeled after the same copy colored by Blake, but they show far greater variation among copies than the Manchester facsimiles. In other words, far greater artistic license was “exercised by the commercial colorists” (Grant 303 n. 3; see also Lange 134-136; Bentley, *Blake Books* 645-646, 956, and “Great Illustrated-Book” 82-88). Taking liberties with the model may reflect the confidence of good colorists, but it may also reflect financial considerations. The more closely one adheres to a model, the more slowly one works.