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ENGL 8003 – Masters by Dissertation

Image and Poetry in Selected Early Works of William Blake: Producing a Third Text

(2 Volumes)

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the relationship between images and poetry in the early illuminated books of William Blake. It seeks to explore the generative production of meaning which arises from the interaction of these different aesthetic modalities. Such meanings are investigated through the notion of a "Third Text", which has been adapted from the thought of Stephen Behrendt ("'Something in my Eye': Irritants in Blake's Illuminated Texts"). The Third Text arises from the interaction of images and texts, but is identical to neither alone, nor is it constituted by the sum of the contributing parts. The interactions of image and text are further elucidated through the application of selected poststructuralist theories, drawn from the writing of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. Notions of the Text, *différance*, the supplement and spectrality are central to the argument. An interaction is established between Blake's illuminated books and the chosen poststructuralist constructs in order to recognise the singularity of the verbal and visual material considered.

An interrelated component of this study is a reflection on the ways in which Blake breaks the conceptual frames of image and text in his illuminated books, thus challenging a range of established models. Particular attention is paid to the early illuminated books, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *America a Prophecy*. Key concerns of this study include the ways in which *Songs* challenges the boundaries between innocence and experience and the exploration of prophetic vision in *America*. The dissertation concludes by emphasising the importance of preserving an infinite relation of image to text, both in Blake studies and more broadly in the analysis of image-text relations.