

Word-Image Intertwining: William Blake's Illuminated Poetry and the Aesthetics of Compositeness

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From *ut pictura poesis* to intermediality, the close, interactive, and complicated relationship between poetry and painting has been an inevitable subject under discussion throughout the historiography of literature and fine art. Different approaches and interpretations to/on their sisterhood could come to a broad spectrum of interartistic ideas and practices. William Blake, an English Romantic poet, painter, and printmaker, links word and image by his invention of relief etching, or more understandably, the illuminated painting which juxtaposes his verse with in-text illustrations simultaneously on the same page. His technical strategy has already implied a dynamic and dialectical interrelation between word and image, like the treatment of earlier medieval manuscripts, yet in a more innovative rather than decorative manner. This article, therefore, through a comparative analysis of both Blake's verbal and visual representations, will first attempt to clarify two distinct modes of combining poetic language with visualisation *vis-à-vis* form and content, and then critically investigate how this word-image interaction can be used to reflect the poet's Romantic thought about sociocultural changes and provide new possibilities of reading, interpretation, and aesthetic complexity in that specific epoch.

Keywords: William Blake, illuminated poetry, Romantic poetics, aesthetics of compositeness, word and image

'Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we image, even as I do now.
What am I? Noting; but not so art thou,
Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
Invisible but gazing, as I glow
Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings' death.
—George Gordon, Lord Byron, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage"

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ideas and practices. William Blake, an seminal English Romantic poet, painter, and printmaker, links word and image by his invention of relief etching, or more understandably, the illuminated painting which juxtaposes his verse with in-text illustrations simultaneously on the same page. His technical strategy has already implied a dynamic and dialectical interrelation between word and image, like the treatment of earlier medieval manuscripts yet, in a more innovative rather than decorative manner. This article, therefore, through a comparative analysis of both Blake's verbal and visual representations, will first attempt to clarify two distinct modes of combining poetic language with visualisation *vis-à-vis* form and content, and then critically investigate how this word-image interaction can be used to reflect the poet's Romantic thought about sociocultural changes, and provide new possibilities of reading, interpretation, and aesthetic complexity in that specific epoch.

As one of the seminal figures during the Romantic Age, Blake devoted most of his life to pictorial art rather than poetry, and accordingly, he established an early reputation as a painter instead of a poet until the early twentieth century. Stephen Greenblatt (2005), in his edited collection of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, even reminds the reader that "read[ing] a Blake poem without the pictures is to miss something important" (p. 77). He (2005) precisely points out that the Blakean arrangement of word and image, not only "mutually enlightening" but also "turbulent" (p. 77), shall not be seen separately but as an organic whole. In the 1850s, Blake's drawings started to be noticed and gradually admired by a group of Pre-Raphaelites, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne. They respected him as a precursor of rejecting dogmatic principles and advocating expressive concepts of abundant details, intensive colours, as well as complicated compositions. Nevertheless, it was not until the mid-1920s that Blake eventually came onto the literary stage. His poetry and poetics astonishingly influenced a large number of modernist poets, such as W. B. Yeats, Allen Ginsberg along with other Beat writers, and later the contemporary graphic narrative. Bindman (2004) classifies Blake's entire career as a painter-poet into three main phases: a young history-related painter from 1779 to 1788 in a sense of conservatism; at the next stage, an inventor of illuminated printing from 1795 to 1810 with the implicit negation of the conventional method (implying a clear separation of verse and design); lastly, a mature artist having experienced public failure and personal success from 1809 to 1820 (pp. 85-86). Throughout Blake's art life, he has "achieved a confident, well-absorbed, and developing visual method [without] identifiable stylistic borrowings" (Bindman, 2004, p. 108), which was derived from his innovation of visible language and acute sensitiveness of the aesthetic and poetic imagination.

The "visible language" referred by W. J. T. Mitchell (1995) is a term dealing with the depiction of objects and scenes, the construction of figures, the arrangement of literary forms into painterly-oriented patterns (p. 111). As a painter-poet and printmaker,¹ Blake's pioneering use of relief etching serves as a vivid demonstration putting the concept of the "visible language" into practice. In doing so, Blake creates an equal, cooperative, and contrapuntal relationship between word and image by means of integrating the poem and the picture within the same frame of the page, transgressive the boundaries of generic media and their fixed forms that are traditionally perceived to be active merely in one field of arts. Moreover, he even virtually upbuilt "a multi-media site" (Viscomi, 2004, p. 42) where he and his wife could write, sketch, engrave, and print in the meantime. This

¹ Printmakers always had no place on the cover of inscriptions or any edition of printed books during that period, but Blake exceptionally signed most of his illuminated work "Printed by W. Blake" or "Author & Printer W. Blake," proud of his manualcraftsmanship and the identity as a printmaker.

original process of associating poetry, painting, and printmaking all together reflects on a sense of Romantic fascination with spontaneity, organicism, and the sensibility of language, which further enables Blake to develop his characteristic illuminated poetics and aesthetics of compositeness.²

From Rationality to Imagination: A Romantic Narrative

William Blake stood at the turn of human history when the backwardness struggled for existence as the advancement had come into being. The advanced development at that moment refers to both the technological progress and the spiritual emancipation. It was an era of a consistent series of reforms and revolutions: the French Revolution, the subsequent debates in Britain, war with France 1793-1815, the Enlightenment and its neoclassic movement throughout Europe, and later the Industrial Revolution. Originating from the period during the 1650s and 1700s, the Scientific Revolution flourished with countertraditional conceptions and innovative discoveries in what is so-called the Age of Reason. Its partial emphasis on reason and rational thinking gradually gave birth to the ideological conflicts between science and art, absolute rationalism and spiritual sensation or imagination.³ Facing the subsequent savage repression by the government that brought about a volatile and risky social atmosphere, Romanticists reacted actively and intensively against the effect of capitalisation, inhumanity of industrialism, and the scientific rationalisation of the nature. To contend with the absolute rationalist, Romantic poets and artists turned to generate a general exaltation of emotion over reason and create a spirit of inspiration and imagination over strictly reason-oriented rules.

Without the invention and widespread appliance of early printing methods and papermaking technology, Blake would never have the chance of sparking the idea of relief etching. His illuminated poems associated with his paintings are in-textually printed or directly engraved in the same plate—a space in common for the Blakean composite artistry and distinct aesthetics of compositeness. Adams (1954) claims that Blake's illustrated poetry attempts to “bring alive that archetypal vision, free of debasement by false interpretation and allegorical presentation, for the edifice of a debased world” (p. 247). He is one of the first modern artists who creates a new form of art:

[T]o articulate fully man's loss of spiritual community but also to seek an answer both in the *communal* myths of the past and the *personal* poetic symbols of the present. [...] Blake's faith in art led him to a form of reality which denied the final truth of nature and abstraction. It led him to express that form as a pattern of symbolism distilled from the debased visions of past mythologies, cleansed and unified in his own imagination. (Adams, 1954, p. 248)

As a Romantic painter poet, a hybridised figure of interart artisthood, Blake spares no effort to literally and artistically reflect a degenerate society in the face of the compelling and overwhelming influence under the French Revolution and the growth of radical movements in Britain. In both verse and pictures, he accuses the monarchy and its state, the church and its priests, and even everyone leading an apathetic life in that corrupt society where there were full of failure of innocence, jealousy of fame and wealth, and abandonment of mercy and

² For more about Blake's engraving techniques and printing skills, see C. H. Collins Baker, “William Blake, Painter”, *The Huntington Library Bulletin*, Vol.10, 1936, pp. 135-148; Jr. G. E. Bentley, “William Blake's Techniques of Engraving and Printing,” *Studies in Bibliography*, vol. 34, 1981, pp. 241-253.

³ See Jürgen Habermas, “Technology and Science as ‘Ideology’,” *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, pp. 81-122; Max Horkheimer, *On the Critique of Instrumental Reason*, translated by Matthew O'Connell, London/New York: Verso, 2013; Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt, New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1977.

self-sympathy. In “The Chimney Sweeper” from *Songs of Experience*, Blake voices for the lower-class people and needy children in particular:

A little black thing among the snow:
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father & mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray. (Blake, 2019, p. 37)⁴

Following the poem, Blake’s plate employs dark, cool colours and intones of melancholy and alienation to depict the young chimney-sweeper with his tools lonely lingering along the empty street. He tries to denounce the exploitation of poverty and asks for the liberation of the impoverished. Apart from this degradative welfare system and social indifference, the unjust, corrupt Christian authority sheltered the obedient bourgeois parents, passers-by, and even readers from a world of lapse, but provided themselves with a dream of Heaven where they could shrug off their moral responsibility and guilt for abusing others:

And because I am happy. & dance & sing.
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King
Who make up a heaven of our misery. (Blake, 2019, p. 37)

Blake identifies no happiness, but despair, fear, repression embedded on people’s faces ironically set, in the backdrop of London, the capital city of Great Britain:

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

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls.
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls (Blake, 2019, p. 46)

Accordingly in its plate, above the title “London,” there is a tiny picture of a young kid (the innocent) leading a spare bearded senior (the experienced) to observe the actual status quo of the modern society, which was inclined to become a place of hopelessness and despair. The textual symbol of blood and tear metaphorically suggests the coming of Flood/Deluge as alluded in the Biblical story of *Noah* that as well appears in the ancient epics of *Atrahasis* (17th B. C.) and *Gilgamesh* (7th B.C.), in order to clean and sanctify the evil and sinful world with an imaginary holy power. However, the vision of the plate signifies a conflagration of punishment and destruction from the inferno burning in the chaotic, disordered, and furious *physio-social milieu*. The big fire symbolises the mental turbulence, rampage, and absolute rationality rooted in one’s individual mind. Paradoxically here, the “textual” water and the “visual” fire come to form a strong tension between the physical violence and psychological therapy, between the state of secularity and that of spirituality.

⁴ Other versions are also noteworthy, see *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, edited by Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, New York: W. W. Norton, 2008; *William Blake: The Early Illustrated Books*, edited by Morris Eaves et al., New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.

It is reasonable that Blake's attitudes towards Religion are simply contradictory: he consistently revealed the corruption and degeneration of the Christian Church during that historical period, whereas his steadfast, pious religious belief forced him to regard God and his disciples as a drug to cure those social diseases. He laid particular emphasis on the function and influence of painting, particularly these religious paintings. The oil painting, fresco, as well as stained glass in Church have taken an important role for long in visualising the Bible stories of Christian publicity and conversion, and in the same veil, the painting or image has served as one of the supreme genres of art as claimed by Leonardo da Vinci since Renaissance.⁵ Bowman (1951) reveals Blake's conviction that "religion and art are one": "[r]eligion was life, art was religion, and art was life" (p. 63) whose primary purpose is to discover the mental world by the power of imagination and to shape a humankind's personality and a country's destiny by realising his/her individual position in society. His psychotherapy of healing the world could always be discovered in *Song of Innocence*, a collection of hymns of happiness, mercifulness, kindness, and righteousness, compared to the desperation, wrathfulness, pain, and evanescence in *Song of Experience*. Take the opposite "The Chimney Sweeper" in *Innocence*, for instance:

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind.
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tome, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.
And so Tome awoke and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm. (Blake, 2019, p. 12)

Blake's spiritual world of innocence, to no small extent, might exist in the realm of literature and poetic imagination, just like a fantasy, a daydream of young kids. He implies that the resurrection and rebirth could only happen after one has suffered. His invention and use of relief etching to publish his illustrated books are the most evident samples of his ambitions to create an experiment of compositeness, an alternative narrative of the visual and linguistic system rather than the traditional one (Essick, 1983, p. 29). At this point, Blake's illuminated poetry does not just take account for the commercial profits, but more significantly, complicates the thematic contents and sociocultural considerations in an organic association with poetic language and aesthetic form. In his later life, he spared no effort and time in illustrating Biblical literature, such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1808), *The Book of Job* (1823-1826), and some unfinished works until the last day—12 August 1927—of his life, e.g., John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1824-1827) and Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1825-1827).

Polarising: Word vs. Image

The Blakean relationship or interplay between word and image is changeable, dynamic, and dialectical. As Chayes (1991) states, William Blake's texts and pictures are always closely juxtaposed, and his designs are sometimes "more than minor decorative motifs [but] form a running counterpoint to the literary texts in his illuminated books" (p. 85). This dialectical logic is figured out by an interactive process between these two genres or mediums, which appears to polarise but reconcile, to echo but oppose. At the beginning of his career,

⁵ See Leonardo da Vinci, *Paragone: A Comparison of the Arts*, translated by Irma A. Richter, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Blake tentatively employed this approach to decorate and enrich his prophecies. It is used in the *Book of Thel* in 1789 and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* in 1793; the former merely juxtaposes words and images side by side to keep the completeness of the text, while the latter successfully breaks up the intra-textual integrity rendering a “free interpenetration” (Frye, 1951, p. 37). However, there still appears an imbalanced relationship between the verse and the design. For example, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* completed in 1793, has proved to be a considerably explicit work but pictorially unsuccessful, as the space of words dominates much more than that of images. In parodic contrast, *Book of Urizen*'s designs in 1794 take up most of the plate with only few lines crowded awkwardly.

As the protagonist of this parody of the *Book of Genesis*, Urizen's image on the book cover could be deemed a personified writing authority, a textual man, a tyrant of law, science, and rationality. Pictorially, the figure is depicted curly sitting on an unfolded book, blind and ageing, with his two hands respectively holding one quill-pen to write on pieces of paper without a pause. From a specific historical and social background, Blake characterises Urizen as a despotic, arbitrary ruler of an absolutely rational world created by his self-created discipline, philosophy, and religion to mirror the rationalists' persecution—rising from the French Revolution—of individuality and imagination. Urizen himself thus became a pious servant and creator of his own monotheism:

Laws of peace, of love, of unity,
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness;
Let each chuse one habitation,
His ancient infinite mansion,
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law. (Blake, 1988, pp. 78-84)

From Urizen's descriptive vision and text, he repeatedly declared his dominance of this new Urizenian world. The dominant power and dramatic change here ironically reflect the post-society after the French Revolution. Blake became aware of the mighty politics of word or the writing of rationalism, when he found its irresistible and compelling energy almost torn apart the European countries. As a result, he turned to graphic art, painting, or more precisely, a sort of composite artistry, to struggle for the right of ideological discourse represented by the rise of Romanticism.

This uncertain relationship between word and image gradually evolves into a complete disharmony with a sequence of never-ending conflicts. By the end of the eighteenth century, the French Revolution disrupted the political, religious, sociocultural restraints and emancipated the natural, humanistic, imaginative power of humanity. To certain degree, the widely spreading influence of the Revolution was owed to the invention of printing, which made it possible to propagate and disseminate throughout the entire continent. As an anti-rationalist at the turning point, Blake showed his ideological contradiction to the mundane world from both his poetics and aesthetics:

[A formal differentiation between] the “book” and the “scroll.” In the context of romantic textual ideology, the book is the symbol of modern rationalist writing and the cultural economy of mechanical reproduction, while the scroll is the emblem of ancient, revealed wisdom, imagination, and the cultural economy of handcrafted, individually expressive

artefacts. We might summarise this contrast as the difference between print culture and manuscript culture. (Mitchell, 1995, p. 132)

“The necessity of contraries” has been as one of Blake’s most featured poetic and artistic principles, namely no contrary no progress, just as “Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate are necessary to Human existence” (Blake, 1988, p. 34) echoing in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Blake compares the “book” and the “scroll” as two different modes of expressiveness, and more importantly, two contradictory ideologies and categories of human civilisation. To be specific, Mitchell emblematically counterposes the book and the scroll into a list of binary oppositions as “an allegory of good and evil”; the book represents “mechanical/ reason/ judgment/ law/ modern/ science/ death/ sleep/ literal/ writing,” whereas the scroll “handcrafted/ imagination/ forgiveness/ prophecy/ ancient/ art/ life/ wakefulness/ spiritual/ speech or song” (Mitchell, 1995, p. 135).

These dualistic conceptions have been indicated in the Blakean philosophy of the text and the vision and explicitly expressed in their iconographic meanings. In the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake appoints the Devil as his speaker to preach the “Proverbs of Hell” (Blake, 1988, pp. 35-38). The Devil’s voice is authorised and symbolised by the poet as a revolutionary power of rebellion and emancipation, foreseeing a predictable revolution of the new world. As illustrated, the Devil sits at the centre of the designed plate between two humans working as his copyists. In addition to its centric position, the Devil’s authority is empowered by the long, colossal scroll unfolding on his thighs. The Devil tends to be characterised as an active, prolific, energetic, and imaginative figure, in contrast to the passive, mechanical, lifeless, and rational copyists. Similarly, in the poetic text, the Devil dictated his prophetic sayings:

But the following Contraries to these are True

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body, and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight. (Blake, 1988, p. 34)

Like other Romantic contemporaneous, Blake interrupts the conventional principle that the soul shall be superior to the body rooted in western philosophy since Plato and Aristotle; in contrast, he gives equal importance to both and emphasises the sensual, physical, and material capacity of the *physio-social milieu*. He steps to acclaim the eternally delightful power of “Energy,” the bodily experience of human beings, which has been oppressed and restrained by the “Reason” or Cartesian scepticism for many decades. Extending his Romantic poetics of the book and the scroll to the subversion of dualism in its ideological sense, the Blakean aesthetics between word and image fully demonstrates the expressiveness and transformative potentiality of the visible language in its specific historical context.

In Blake’s other religious writings, he concretised the tension between the imagination (vision) and the reason (text) into God’s godly edifications and the acceptance of Christians. The scroll or painting represents the didactic or prophetic perceptions from Jesus; the book or paper stands for his followers’ learning and recitation. Blake wrote in the preface of *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804-1820), seeing the “books” as the medium of Christian education:

Reader! lover of books lover of heaven
And of that God from whom all books are given,

Who in mysterious Sinais awful cave
 To man the wond'rous art of writing gave,
 Again he speaks in thunder and in fire!
 Thunder of thought and flames of fierce desire:
 Even from the depths of hell his voice I hear,
 Within the unfathomed caverns of my ear.
 Therefore I print; nor vain my types shall be:
 Heaven, Earth & Hell henceforth shall live in harmony. (Blake, 1988, p. 145)

Hither the poet claims, that “my types” of printing would harmonise the “Heaven, Earth & Hell” and the relationship between poetic language and graphic art by this form of compositeness. Later, in Plate 64 of *Jerusalem*, Blake depicts a man lying asides a book while looking up at the sky—maybe the direction of the Paradise where there were living angels and fairs. It seemed that the man was thinking or hearing the recall from deities. The plate attempts to provide us with a picture of meditation. The arrangement of the illustration and poetic lines differentiates the spirituality from the physicality, the prophecy from the instruction.

One of typical applications of this analogical arrangement could be found in Blake's *Illustrations to the Book of Job* (1826), where Blake visually depicts the scene that Job told the Biblical stories and personal experiences throughout his life, surrounded by three beautiful daughters. In a previous plate published in 1821, Job's hands stretching out to the fine-framed paintings on the wall, pointed at the picture to narrate the story within/from it. Later in another version of this plate of watercolour in 1827, Blake substitutes the mounted paintings with a fictionalised vision above the Job's mind. However, Job's daughters tamely listened to Father's teaching as taking notes on their hand panel, their act of writing becomes a trace or evidence of their obedience to patriarchal power in blood affinity and the Christian faith. Blake opposes word with image, knowledge and imagination, alongside with a chain of related binary oppositions, i.e., voice and sight, ancient and modern texts, Romanticism and Rationalism, etc.. The association of various media, ranging from book, sheet, scroll, fresco, to auditory and visual expressions, transcribes the spiritual meaning of Job's story into a concretised performance of the visible language. Despite apparent polarisation, the reconciliation would be further analysed in the next section, where the Blakean dialectical relationship between word and image would arrive at the ideological and aesthetic level.

Reconciling: Word & Image

Besides the function of illustrations as decoration or supplement, Willam Blake's designs embrace a wide range of connotative and denotative meanings, which are able to demystify the “language by making it appear less as a transcendental sign system and more as a material object” (Lundeen, 1994, p. 359), a composite artistry in its own. Frye (1951) once analogises Blake's “natural symbols” of “pictorial metamorphosis” with the technique of the *leitmotif* in a Wagner Opera (p. 38). In a similar sense, Bowman (1951) focuses on Blake's natural symbolism that opposes the abstraction to the concreteness of the sensory world, separate from his Romantic contemporaries like John Keats and William Wordsworth (p. 56). Simple dictions, concise stanzas, and intrinsic symbols make Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in 1794 far more thematically complicated for readers' first glance. As a pair of binary poems respectively collected in two *Songs*, “The Lamb” and “The Tyger” tend to be structured in a duality of two contradictory ideologies. Blake's illustration for “The Lamb”

creates a natural, harmonious, and vigorous environment with lush and fertile cropland where a naked child stretched his arm to the flock of lambs. From a religious perspective, both the innocent child and lambs allude to the Son of God. Without saying much about the Christian doctrines, the speaker—Jesus (also discovered in the given lines) apostrophically conveyed the idea of innocence, ignorance, purity, *naïveté*, and peace with a strong faith in Christianity:

He is called by thy name,
 For he calls himself a Lamb;
 He is meek & he is mild,
 He became a little child;
 I a child & thou a lamb,
 We are called by his name. (Blake, 2019, p. 8)

To the contrary, its companion poem “The Tyger” conversely connotes an industrialised society unbalancing nature, the spirit, and the human:

What the hammer? what the chain?
 In what furnace was thy brain?
 What the anvil? what dread grasp
 Dare its deadly terrors clasp? (Blake, 2019, p. 42)

“Hammer,” “chain,” “furnace,” “anvil” all are tools signifying a metal, realistic, and industrial world where the revolutionary power inspires the fierce force out of the human soul under the control of the absolute reason and rational thinking. Pictorially, Blake illustrates a solitary tiger with eyes opening astonishingly under a sterile tree, constituting a stark contrast to that of “The Lamb.” It is the poet (rather than Jesus) as the speaker who asked the tiger, “Did he smile his work to see?/ Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” (Blake, 2019, p. 8), featured with an inborn exquisite symmetry but an acquired destructive power. God’s discursive and pictorial absence incarnates the mortal world as a mystic with dread, tear, and terror. Harold Bloom (1961), in his *Visionary Company*, also recognises this religious theme by saying that (if *Songs* was a reply of “God”) “*The Lamb* means triumphant reassurance; and to *The Tyger*, it means an enslaving resignation” (p. 35). On the contrary, Bloom (1961) sharply reveals the alternate effects when *Songs* is designated to give another reply of “Man,” that “*The Lamb* means horror; to *The Tyger*, it means triumphant and emancipated humanism” (p. 35). To conclude this point, the connotative and denotative meanings in Blake’s illuminated poetry tend to be as concrete and specific as possible with blood and flesh rather than symbolised abstractions. Seen from his poetics, to objectify the imagery is to turn language into a visual image to make his poetic language visible, palpable, and imaginable. Blake’s “symbols” are more imaginative, intricate, abstruse to be identified and understood in this sense. They not only transform the abstract meaning in mind into a concrete image on paper but also contextualise it into multifold references and render it easier to reveal the ultimate truth.

Besides, Blake’s designs always provide us with extra explicit information with no hint in the text alone. The intertextual relationship between his poems and designs encourages the reader to closely read this Blakean form of mixed art as an organic whole: the poem is illustrated with a visual narrative, whereas the illustration itself connotes and extends the lineation of the poem with diversified interpretation. For instance, “Infant Joy”

narrates an imaginary dialogue between a newborn baby and his/her mother with the fictitious question raised by the innocent infant:

I have a no name
 I am but two days old.—
 What shall I call thee?
 I happy am
 Joy is my name.—
 Sweet joy befall thee! (Blake, 2019, p. 25)

The whole poem performs as an adorable hymn between a loving mother and her immortal beloved child, with a fascinating imagination of naming. It seems to become a little bit weak and thematically limited, more like a nursery rhythm rather than a Blakean poem. Notwithstanding, when we pay attention to its illustration, our witty and adventurous painter-poet visually sets the story in a vast flame-shaped blooming flower, in which attended a(n) fairy or angel. As a significant part of the spiritual participation, God's representative came to baptise the Christian infant, who would be given names usually three or more days after birth. The protective blossom looks like a sacred site of performing rituals or a Christian sanctuary offering care, assistance, and security for a laical joy. The visual image of "Infant Joy" would not only help to explore the religious and sexual connotations but also interact with another tiny and seemingly simple poem, i.e., "The Blossom":

Merry merry Sparrow
 Under leaves so green
 A happy Blossom
 Sees you swift as arrow
 Seek your cradle narrow
 Near my bosom. (Blake, 2019, p. 11)

Read at the surface level, "The Blossom" eulogises a peaceful, melodic lyric between the blossom and sparrow and robin, suggesting a genuine reconciliation. In consideration of the same motif of "blossom/flower" textually and visually, "Infant Joy" sheds further light on the potential theme of sexuality in "The Blossom." The colossal flower in its original plate indicates the female sexual organ that is pregnant and going to give birth, while the right one still in bud connotes the sexual growth from a young girl into a mature woman. With those symbolic references, "The Blossom" appears to be a joyful family life between a Mother (blossom) and several Infants (sparrow and robin). The keywords could be discovered within those short lines: "merry," "leaves," "happy," "cradle," "blossom". If "Infant Joy" tells about the biological development of womanlihood and maternity, "The Blossom" must be concerned with the mental accomplishment of sexual love. The device of intermediality crossing the frames of word and image concentrates on the semiotic model of poetic language and graphic art to understand and explain the connotative meanings in-between their medial affinity.

Another recondite illustrated plate of "The Sick Rose" comprises a great variety of aesthetic tension within an eight-line tiny but powerful poem. Seen from the design, the unhealthy corolla of rose faintly falls down onto the ground, and its stem and leaves fade from verdant green to sick yellow:

O Rose thou art sick.
 The invisible worm.
 That flies in the night

In the howling storm. (Blake, 2019, p. 39)

In most of rose poetry, the rose conventionally represents the human love, as the motif in Robert Burns's "A Red, Red Rose" and Keats's "To A Friend Who Sent Me Some Roses." Blake's rose, on the other hand, used to be beautiful and young but now it becomes attacked or inflected by an "invisible worm," which serves as a quintessential symbol of death and decay, even resonating with the Biblical serpent. By means of metonymy, the worm symbolises the sexual organ of the male and personifies a play boy courting for beauty when it:

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love (Blake, 2019, p. 39)

The "bed" denotes both the natural flowerbed and the lover's bed, where a worm encroaches or a man stains a girl's virgin. The "crimson joy" after the sexual love turns to be a sense of guilt, shame, and sin. In the drawing, the females—in the same purplish-red colour as the rose—apparently humanised rosebuds, painfully grovel on the thorny stem in an inferior position of heterosexuality. Hence, bodily love can be dangerous, destructive, and harmful to one's innocence, and finally, "Does thy life destroy" (Blake, 2019, p. 39).

Facing the unequal relationship between the worm and the rose likewise, Blake sets up a series of binary oppositions of Christian theology: the body and the soul, the flesh and the spirit, the instinct and the rational, the drives and the consciousness. Bloom also analyses this poem in great details, and rather than the religious interpretation as mentioned above, he points out the oppositeness in the original human nature of different genders, based on a series of explicit explanation of the symbolic imageries:

The bed has to be "found out" because it is concealed, and it is already a bed "of crimson joy" before the worm comes to it. The elements of deliberate concealment and of sexual self-gratification make it clear that the poem attacks the myth of female flight and male pursuit, with its sinister pattern of sexual refusal and consequent destructiveness. The worm's love is a dark, secret love and hence destroys life, yet the worm comes invisibly in the night and be agency of the howling storm because a bright open love would not be received. Neither worm nor rose is truly at fault, for Nature has concealed the rose bed and so set the male and female generative contraries against one another. The poem's force is in its hinted human parallel, where concealment is more elaborate and the destructive rape-marriage a social ritual. (Bloom, 1961, p. 45)

The negation and destruction of human love are derived from the dualistic roles of male and female and their masculinity and femininity: the former is an active, aggressive, selfish pursuer; the latter appears to be a passive, unwilling, hypocritical refuser.⁶ Besides, the rose and worms can also symbolise a severely sick society filled with disease, death, and confinement from freedom, which, moment by moment, faced the inescapable danger resulted from the industrialised and technological power. The absolute rationality poisoned and swallowed the state of passion, sympathy, imagination, and moral consciousness. Like other Romantic poets, Blake tried to save and heal the mental aspect of modern people. That is no wonder that Matthew Arnold (1954) crowns the poetry and literature as the supreme activity of human being: "Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry" in best of which people

⁶ In addition to binary oppositions within Blake's poetry, his painting/engraving also reveals this treatment, Bowman (1951) claims that "the remarkable contrast between the explosive and tranquil, the sharp and the soft, the heavy and light" (p. 63).

find “truth and seriousness” or moral excellence (pp. 56+66). Instead of religion, philosophy, or science, poetry would provide indispensable values, truths, and social norms for one’s life and humanity.

Conclusion: Toward the Aesthetics of Compositeness

In a view of a brief introduction to William Blake’s lifelong career as a painter-poet and his basic doctrines of printmaking, the comparative analysis between his poems and paintings explicates his inventive arrangement simultaneously within the same temporal and time spatial dimensions. The Blakean performance of a complex and radical form of mixed art brings to light the flexible and interactive relationship between word and image: to dualise them representing two opposed cultural ideologies; in the meantime, to neutralise them utilising a creative poetic form. To some extent, Blake has inherited Horace’s dictum *ut pictura poesis* and creatively developed it into a new Romantic formula of “speaking picture” by the modern politics of printing, or more precisely, relief-etching. His aesthetics of compositeness serves as an arching platform, not only bridging the formal or generic gap between the verbal and the visual, and the cultural gap between *poesis* and *pictura*, but also bridging the aesthetic gap between the sublimity and the beauty, the sexual gap between female and male, the philosophical gap between subject and object, and the spiritual gap between the body/human and soul/divinity (Baulch, 1997, p. 365). Therefore, following this experimental aesthetics, the composite artform that functions as a visible language, offers the reader more thematic space, referential possibility, and metaphorical meaning in varied manners of decoration, complement, as well as connotation, which reveals an organic interplay between the poetic language and the pictorial art. More importantly, it highlights the sensory and imaginative faculty as a potent force at that specific moment, against the social chaos resulted from industrialisation and the absolute rationalism as the long-dominating ideology behind it.

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