

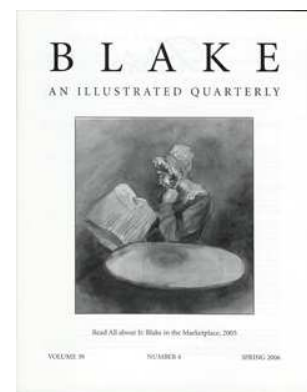
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William Blake in “The Vanguard of the Age”

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But it is also possible that *Milton* at one time may have contained something like sixty plates, as Bentley himself has thought possible (BR 187n4). *Milton* clearly went through several stages of expansion and contraction during the course of its composition, as reflected in the varying number of plates in the different copies, and one of the early stages apparently included material about the English Civil War (BPAE 423-24), subsequently deleted, which linked it with the Lambeth Prophecies as one more chapter in the history of revolution. Erdman's speculations on "the missing ten books of *Milton*" (BPAE 423-24) which linger in the background of "the early and late versions," i.e., the "revolutionary version" and the pacifistic version (BPAE 425-27), suggest that at least a few pages of the early twelve-book form were committed to copper before being erased. In 1845 J. T. Smith recalled that Blake often "rubbed out" already etched plates "to enable him to use them for other subjects."²⁰ Though he did not describe how these etched plates were erased, presumably an already etched plate could be polished to a clean surface like a new one more readily than it could be revised for corrections or additions.²¹ If so, this would supply the ten or more pages added to the existing forty-five to fifty pages of *Milton* (copies A-C) to make up the mysterious "60."

One final consideration in the case against the half-finished *Jerusalem* of 1807 is the date on the title page. How is the date of 1804, inscribed at the bottom of the page, to be understood if the poem was not actually begun until at least 1808? Butlin has commented on Blake's "habit of pre-dating works unparalleled until its adoption by some of the pioneers of the modern movement,"²² which may well be the case here. In fact, the only reason for taking 1804 as the date at which Blake started work on *Jerusalem* is simply the date "1804" of the title page, squeezed in above the signature in a cramped space at the bottom of the page, looking almost like an afterthought. The date is not an integral part of the design of the page, as it is so strikingly in the title page of *Milton*, or even of the signature itself, as in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* ("Printed by William Blake : 1793."), *The Song of Los*, *The First Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, and *The Book of Los*. Instead, the date "1804" is etched in white line, i.e., incised on a large dark area, which could readily be done any time after 1804, if indeed the page as a whole was designed and etched that year rather than in 1808 or 1809 or whenever he did in fact begin *Jerusalem*. The addition of the 1804 date presumably was caused by his desire to link the two poems, as they seem to have been linked in their gestation, or perhaps to tie them both to a significant date in Blake's life, the rebirth of inspiration following his return from Felpham and his acquittal at his January 1804

20. BR 26n1, and cf. Viscomi 389-90n4 and BB 225-28, 335.

21. See Viscomi 48-49 on the preparation of the plate for etching or engraving. Viscomi nowhere refers to Smith's statement quoted above, from his 1845 *Book for a Rainy Day*.

22. Martin Butlin, *William Blake* (London: Tate Gallery, 1978) 27.

trial, or still more the mysterious experience of renewal at the Truchsessian Gallery in October 1804.

To place *Jerusalem* firmly in the decade of the 1810s sets it in a far more meaningful context of Blake's life than that of the mid-1800s. It links the poem to the mood of contrition and forgiveness of his last work, as contrasted with the spirit of condemnation and self-justification of the ending of *Milton*. It also answers the question of what Blake was doing in the years from 1810 to 1818, when he virtually disappeared from the London art world and apparently produced little work of significance compared with that of the decades immediately preceding and following. Only the hundred plates of *Jerusalem*, in both its verbal and visual dimensions, fill this puzzling gap in the output of a major artist at the height of his powers. Its record of profound spiritual struggle and triumph in the face of worldly defeat was a labor calling forth all of Blake's imaginative strength. Seen from this perspective, the composition of *Jerusalem* appears a striking example of what Charles Lamb was the first to describe as the sanity of true genius: as the creative means by which Blake regained his creative wholeness after the crisis of the years preceding 1810.

MINUTE PARTICULAR

William Blake in "The Vanguard of the Age"

BY MORTON D. PALEY

In 1887 there appeared in *The Architect: A Weekly Illustrated Journal of Art, Civil Engineering, and Building* an illustrated series of articles entitled "The Vanguard of the Age."¹ Written by Hugh Stannus and illustrated by reproductions of drawings by Herbert Johnson after paintings by Edward Armitage, R.A., these articles were a tribute to Henry Crabb Robinson on the subject of a monument to his memory. The monument comprised a series of paintings commissioned by Robinson's friends and painted by Armitage in 1870-71 on the walls of University Hall, London. Robinson (1775-1867), a founder of the University of London, had also been a mov-

1. 37 (Jan.-June 1887): 9-10, 23-24, 35, 42-44.



Detail from *The Vanguard of the Age*, ink-photo reproduction of a drawing by Herbert Johnson after a painting by Edward Armitage. Reproduced by permission of the New York Public Library.

ing spirit behind University Hall, a University College dining hall founded in celebration of the Dissenters' Chapels Act of 1844.² (The building, in Gordon Square, is now occupied by Dr. Williams's Library.) Armitage's paintings deteriorated and were papered over, but the illustrations and verbal descriptions that compose "The Vanguard of the Age" now serve as a record of its original. One of its numerous interesting features³ is the place given to William Blake.

2. For information about University Hall I am grateful to David Bindman.

3. The image of Coleridge in "The Vanguard of the Age" is discussed in my *Portraits of Coleridge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 122-23. Some factual material is necessarily repeated here.

The large foldout illustration in which Blake appears follows page 22 in *The Architect* for 14 January 1887. In the lower right of the reproduction is printed "INK-PHOTO. SPRAGE & CO. 22 MARTINS LANE. CANNON ST, LONDON, E.C. ILLUSTRATIONS: THE VANGUARD OF THE AGE." The ink-photo process, which was introduced by Sprage and Co., has been described as involving "collotypes, made initially on a surface of reticulated gelatine on a glass base." A photo negative was printed on this surface, and, after a good many steps, a "lithographic printing surface" was made "from which the actual impressions were taken."⁴ Blake is represented in a manner deriving from the Thomas Phillips portrait of 1807 (National Portrait Gallery), which was well known through graphic reproductions.⁵ Blake is shown as one of a group around Robinson, of which the others are Charles and Mary Lamb, Robert Southey, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Flaxman.⁶ Stannus writes:

Art is represented in the group by two men. WILLIAM BLAKE may have seen more visions than any other seer since the days of SWEDENBORG. ROBINSON was his friend also, and often went to the room in Fountain Court where BLAKE and his wife lived in a simplicity that was ideal. FLAXMAN, the sculptor, will always be identified with University College, with which the Hall is associated, for there alone is it possible to form an idea of what he was as a sculptor.

The last sentence refers, of course, to University College's great collection of full-sized plaster models of Flaxman's sculptures, and although Stannus gets some facts about Blake slightly wrong—the Fountain Court apartment consisted of more than one room, and Robinson may have visited less frequently than "often"—the featuring of Blake in such proximity to Robinson in the original⁷ shows how closely they were associated in the minds of the latter's friends. As "one who is very much delighted with being in good Company,"⁸ Blake appears very much at home among the Vanguard of the Age.

4. See Geoffrey Wakeman, *Victorian Book Illustration: The Technical Revolution* (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1973) 142-43. I thank Robert N. Essick for supplying this reference.

5. Louis Schiavonetti's engraving after Phillips had appeared as the frontispiece to the editions of Robert Blair's *The Grave* published by R. H. Cromek in 1808 and by R. Ackermann in 1813, and the image had been re-engraved by A. L. Dick for editions published in New York in 1847 and 1858.

6. The group occupies half of the foldout, design area 14 1/4 x 8 7/8 in.

7. In Armitage's painting, Robinson was pictured as "an old man seated at a table," an image based on a photograph of 1868 (National Portrait Gallery), according to Richard Walker, *Regency Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1985) 1: 416-17. This image was not reproduced in *The Architect*.

8. Blake's autograph, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 698.