

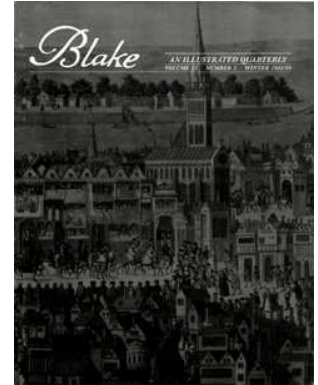
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A R T I C L E

Canterbury Revisited: The Blake-Cromek Controversy

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BY AILEEN WARD

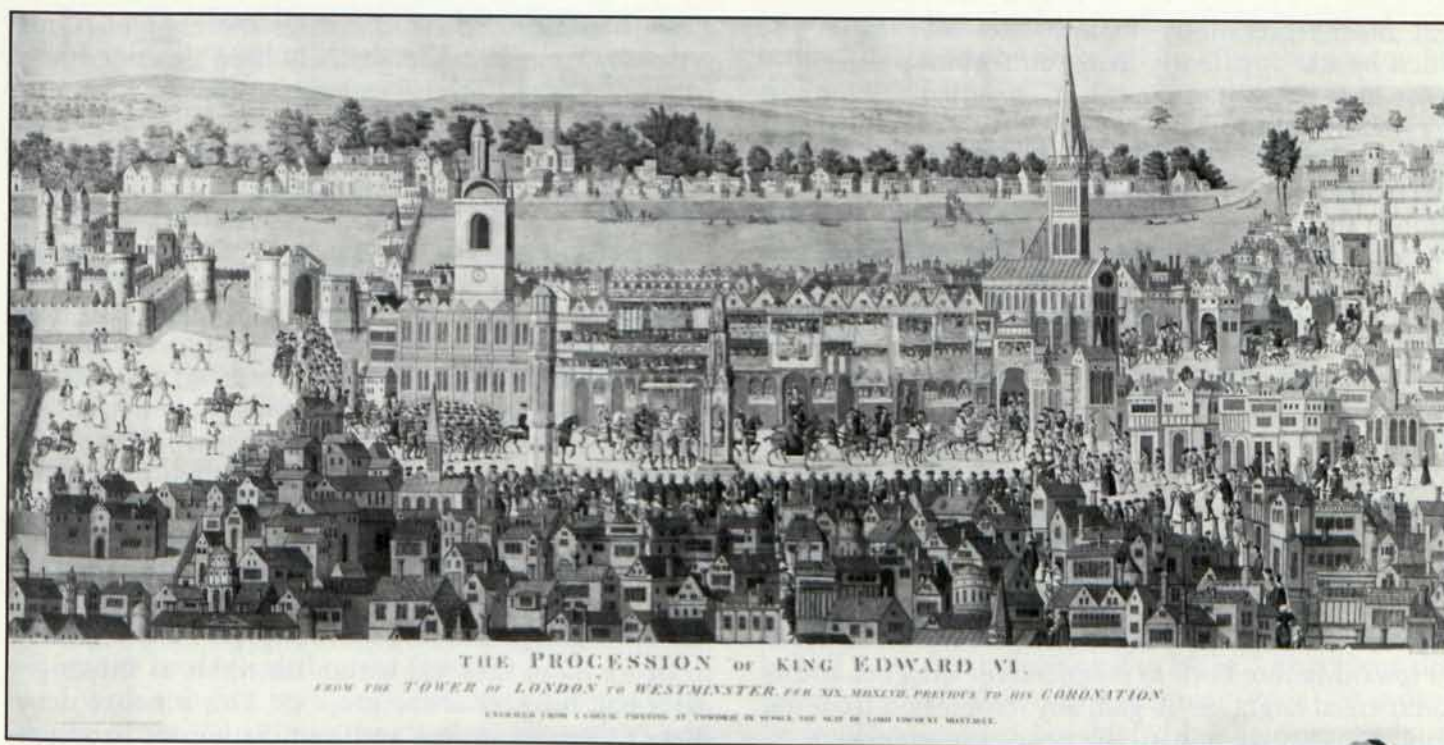
If crooked roads without improvement are the ways of genius, the road Blake took to Canterbury was a veritable Pilgrim's Progress. For of all his works of art, the one that cost him the most grief and stirred up the greatest controversy during his lifetime was the large "fresco" painting of *Sir Jeffery Chaucer and the Nine and Twenty Pilgrims on their Journey to Canterbury*. This painting, dated 1808, was the major work in Blake's 1809 Exhibition and the first to be attacked in Robert Hunt's scathing review in *The Examiner*. It also caused a bitter falling-out between Blake and his old friend Thomas Stothard, who in May 1807 had exhibited an immensely successful oil painting of the same subject, similar in size and basic design to Blake's own. Blake's engraving from his fresco, entitled *Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims*, was published in October 1810; the engraving of Stothard's painting was delayed, through a series of mishaps, till 1817. Stothard protested that Blake had "commenced his picture in rivalry" to Stothard's own, since, he reported, Blake had seen and admired his *Procession of Chaucer's Pilgrims to Canterbury* while it was still in progress. Blake on his side claimed that he had sketched the design for his *Pilgrims* even earlier and had shown the drawing to Robert Cromek, his erstwhile agent, who, while appearing to be delighted with it, had taken the idea to Stothard and engaged him to paint it instead.

Such are the outlines of the controversy as described by Blake's earliest biographers, quite evenhandedly by John Thomas Smith in 1828 and, with obvious bias against Blake, by Allan Cunningham in 1830.¹ But since the appearance of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* in 1863, the controversy has been regarded as settled: virtually every twentieth-century biographer or critic who has discussed the matter has, despite minor uncertainties over points of fact, followed Gilchrist in taking sides with Blake and accusing Cromek of treachery.² Yet it must be borne in mind that the story of Blake's life as hitherto received is based in very large part

on Blake's own testimony, supported by a modicum of corroboratory evidence — that is, on Blake's recollections during his sixties which he passed on to the disciples who became Gilchrist's informants some three decades later. A fresh look at the evidence in the dispute over *The Canterbury Pilgrims* may not merely suggest a different interpretation of a central episode in Blake's life but also serve as example of the need for a critical re-examination of his life as a whole. In the process the critic must scrutinize the minutest particulars of fact, weigh conflicting testimony, and keep constantly in mind the ambiguity of interpretation and the fallibility of memory. The remembrance of things past is a voyage over shifting sands.

Gilchrist based his account largely on John Linnell's notes on Smith's memoir, which he wrote in 1855 drawing on conversations with Blake over thirty years earlier. According to Linnell, Cromek actually commissioned Blake to finish the Canterbury fresco for twenty guineas with the promise that he would also receive the much more lucrative fee for engraving it — the identical arrangement he had made with Blake for his designs for Blair's *Grave* two or three months earlier. But, Linnell states, Cromek secretly negotiated with William Bromley to engrave Blake's design; meanwhile Blake became suspicious and refused to give Cromek his drawing when requested; whereupon Cromek took the idea and the commission to Stothard without informing either painter of the other's involvement. Gilchrist like Linnell clears Stothard of complicity in Cromek's scheme; he also quotes an insulting letter that Cromek wrote to Blake in May 1807 which contains the only known reference to the dispute by either of the two principals. The letter consists mainly of Cromek's abusive response to Blake's "furious rage" at the success of Stothard's *Procession* (then being exhibited in London) by challenging Blake "to send [him] a better": whereupon, Gilchrist adds, "the indignant painter acted in executing, hereafter, his

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The coronation procession of Edward VI from the Tower to Westminster by an unknown sixteenth-century painter, engraved by James Basire in 1787. Photo courtesy of The Society of Antiquaries of London.

projected 'fresco' from *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, and exhibiting and engraving it."³

Gilchrist's suggestion, that Blake painted, exhibited, and engraved his *Pilgrims* only after seeing Stothard's painting and in response to Cromek's challenge in 1807, is curiously inconsistent with his earlier statement (following Linnell) that Cromek first saw a sketch of the *Pilgrims* by Blake and then, after negotiations between them broke down, went to Stothard and "suggested the subject as a novelty." Indeed, the precise chronology of the whole affair is a puzzle. If, as it is generally assumed, Blake had begun work on his fresco (or even his engraving) sometime late in 1805 or early in 1806,⁴ his delay in meeting the threat to his own project till 1808 is inexplicable: the subject had never been painted before, and priority was an important concern. It is also difficult to understand why Blake, on seeing Stothard's half-finished painting in 1806, would have failed to mention his own work in progress to his friend, who was surprised and angered on learning later of Blake's rival version.⁵ Finally, it is striking that Cromek's letter of May 1807 nowhere mentions any drawing or painting of Chaucer's *Pilgrims* by Blake, or replies to any charge by Blake of the

theft of his idea; rather it suggests that Blake's rage was directed against the extraordinary success of Stothard's painting and what he felt was Stothard's contemptible treatment of the subject. The earliest accounts of the affair are vague about dates and mutually contradictory on certain points, and it is hardly surprising that recent discussions also give a confused picture of the entire controversy.⁶ A survey of the relationship between Blake and Cromek from the beginning may help to clarify matters.

We should start by recalling the depressed state of the craft of engraving in the 1800's as well as the low ebb of Blake's fortunes at that time. Partly this was a matter of economics—the decay of the crafts system in general, the low state of the economy, the development of new techniques of reproduction, and the collapse of the European market for English prints as a result of the war with Napoleon. The bank crash of 1797, which had contributed to the failure of Blake's illustrated edition of *Night Thoughts*, had also bankrupted Boydell's ambitious *Shakespeare Gallery*; the imperilled state of engraving in England during the 1800's led to the founding of a short-lived Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving by the Chalcographic Society in 1810.⁷

But Blake's precarious circumstances around 1805—when he was apparently living on a guinea a week⁸—must also be seen in terms of changing fashions in graphics. All during his career English taste in print-making had been shifting away from traditional line engraving to the newer tonal processes of mezzotint, stipple, and aquatint. For Blake, trained primarily in the linear tradition, pure line remained his chosen medium; the "old Hard Stiff & Dry" effects that his teachers at the Royal Academy reproved him for admiring were the very qualities that turned prospective buyers away from *Night Thoughts* and toward the softer more painterly style of Bartolozzi and his disciples.⁹ Contemporary critics found Blake's engraving technique "defective," "completely inferior" to such rivals as Schiavonetti, and condemned his designs as "deformity and extravagance." Boydell, Macklin, and Bowyer had passed him over in their ambitious publishing projects, and now even Hayley and Flaxman were withdrawing their support.¹⁰ By the autumn of 1805, then, Blake seemed headed toward failure both as independent designer and as commercial engraver. To gain any recognition from the public, his work emphatically needed promotion.

This is the point at which Robert Hartley Cromeck entered the scene. A book collector and moderately successful engraver, Cromeck had studied under Bartolozzi at the same time as Schiavonetti; he was a good friend of the Flaxmans and George Cumberland and probably acquainted for some years with both Blake and Stothard. Though his work had won high praise from Flaxman, Cromeck decided about this time to give up engraving for the more active life of print-publisher and dealer.¹¹ With little capital behind him, he conceived of a large illustrated edition of Robert Blair's popular if lugubrious poem *The Grave* as his first project, and he showed a courageous taste in choosing Blake in September 1805 to do the designs. In a letter to Hayley of 27 November 1805 enclosing a copy of a Prospectus for the volume, Blake spoke warmly of his friend Cromeck's "liberality" in commissioning a set of drawings (for a fee of twenty guineas) and of his "Spirited Exertions" in securing the recommendations of thirteen Royal Academicians for the work—the high-water mark of recognition by the Academy that he was to receive in his lifetime. Blake added that Cromeck was so pleased with the twenty designs he selected "that he with the same liberality with which he set me about the drawings, has now set me to Engrave them."¹² However, in a second Prospectus almost identical with the first and like it dated November 1805, the number of plates was reduced to twelve and the name of Schi-

avonetti substituted for Blake's as the engraver. This action by Cromeck has repeatedly been described as a betrayal of Blake, on the assumption that Cromeck had arbitrarily transferred the commission to Schiavonetti and perfidiously issued the second Prospectus without informing Blake of his decision, neither of which seems to be the case. The November 1805 date of the second Prospectus, on which the charge of Cromeck's perfidy rests, now appears to be incorrect; it was evidently issued a month or two later, and there is no reason to think that Cromeck concealed his decision from Blake till after it was printed.¹³ The decision itself was his reaction to Blake's first engraving for *The Grave*, his design for "Death's Door"—his first plate etched completely in white line, a revolutionary inversion of traditional technique. The potential subscribers who viewed the proofs at Cromeck's place of business were evidently nonplussed or worse; and Cromeck, realizing that Blake's bold ruggedness of treatment would doom the book to failure, hastily turned to Schiavonetti to engrave the designs instead—a move that was within his rights as the originator and financier of the project.¹⁴ This is not to deny Blake's disappointment and humiliation, or to accept the popular preference for Schiavonetti's style over Blake's, or to recast the "Fiends of Commerce" as the heroes of the piece: only to remind ourselves that—as J. T. Smith drily remarked—"it would be unreasonable to expect the booksellers to embark in publications not likely to meet remuneration."¹⁵

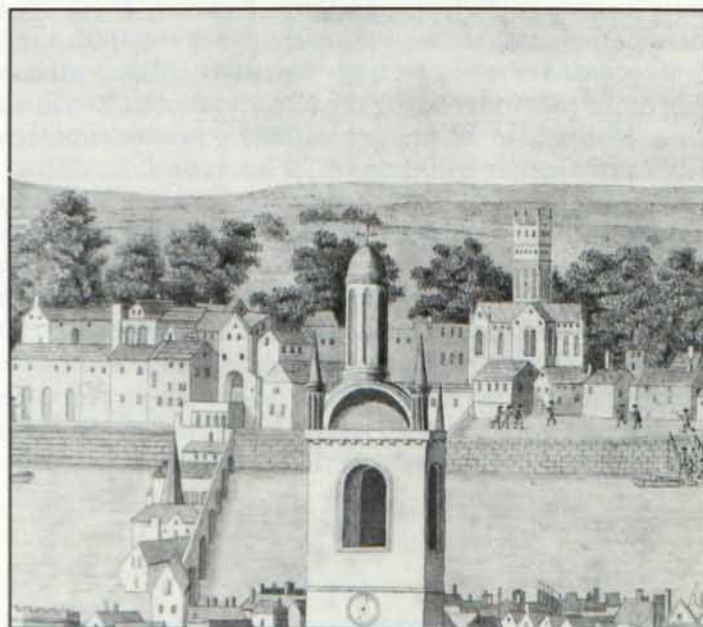
However, Cromeck has been depicted as an unscrupulous publisher, a "printjobber" who "jockeyed Blake out of his copyright" and made windfall profits on the venture. But Blake would not have retained the copyright even if he had done the engravings for *The Grave*: as with his arrangement in 1796 with Richard Edwards for *Night Thoughts*, once he sold his designs the copyright passed automatically to the purchaser, who assumed the costs of publication (including the engraving) in the hope of making a profit.¹⁶ Edwards, incidentally, paid Blake a mere twenty guineas—or 9 1/2d. each—for his 537 folio-size watercolor designs for *Night Thoughts*, though probably five pounds (Blake's usual fee) for each of his forty-three engravings.¹⁷ By May 1807, it is true, Cromeck's twenty-guinea fee for the twenty designs to *The Grave* no longer seemed liberal to Blake, who had evidently heard that Cromeck had paid Stothard a hundred guineas for his Chaucer painting and was making huge profits on the exhibition: hence his angry demand of four guineas for the dedication page which elicited Cromeck's angry reply. But Cromeck's

profits on *The Grave* have been vastly exaggerated, from Kathleen Raine's figure of "about £1800" down to Bentley's more cautious estimate of £900.¹⁸ Even this latter figure needs correcting. First, it underestimates Cromek's fee to Schiavonetti by almost £300; second, it computes the sales figures in terms of the post-publication price of two and a half guineas instead of the subscription price of two guineas; and third, it does not take into account Cromek's travel expenses for over two years throughout England and Scotland, drumming up subscriptions and then delivering the finished books, which he had packed himself.¹⁹ A revised estimate of his profits for nearly three years' work on the edition comes to about £295—not including travel expenses.²⁰ And Cromek's "Spirited Exertions" did not cease after securing the recommendations of the Academicians. He persuaded Fuseli to write a glowing endorsement of Blake's designs, exhibited the drawings in London and the provinces, found subscribers for almost 700 copies, advertised the book repeatedly, and finally arranged for the volume to be dedicated to the Queen.²¹

With this first episode of the Blake-Cromek relationship in mind we may turn back to the quarrel over the *Canterbury Pilgrims* project. The first point at issue is whether the idea for the painting originated with Blake or with Cromek. Both Smith and Linnell state that it was Blake's; but this ascription is unlikely, even though it has been almost universally accepted. In the first place, both Smith and Linnell erroneously credit Blake with the original idea for the *Grave* designs, and they may be in similar error about the Chaucer project. More important, it was Blake's habit as an engraver to work on "tasks happily prescribed by others," as Gilchrist put it, especially with ambitious undertakings such as *Night Thoughts* and *The Grave*. Living largely on publishers' advances, continually short of cash, Blake simply could not afford to embark on a long-term independent project in 1805; in fact, with the exception of his illustrations to Hayley's *Ballads*, he had not published any engravings of his own design for over ten years.²² Furthermore, it is striking that Blake never evinced an interest in Chaucer prior to his 1808 painting and his 1809 *Descriptive Catalogue*. Only one reference to Chaucer occurs in all his poetry, on the next-to-last page of *Jerusalem* (98:9), and his discussion of Chaucer's universality in the *Catalogue* is heavily indebted to Dryden's comments in his preface to the *Fables*.²³ Indeed, from all we know of Blake's preoccupations in 1805, a painting of Chaucer's Pilgrims seems one of the least likely projects he could

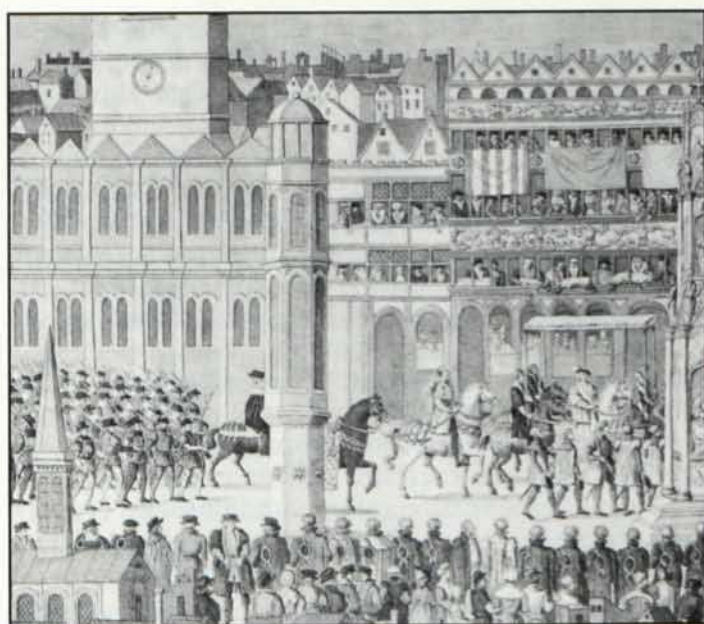
have undertaken. In the absence of any expressed concern with Chaucer by Blake before 1808, there seems no reason, then, to doubt Cromek's word when he congratulated himself "for thinking of such a glorious Subject" in a letter to James Montgomery of April 1807.²⁴ Cromek's own interest in Chaucer—like that of many other readers including Coleridge—may have been kindled by William Godwin's popular biography of 1803, the first attempt at a full-length life. His account of picking up a copy of the *Tales* in Halifax in the summer of 1806 while waiting for the London coach and conceiving of the idea for a painting of the Pilgrims which he then took to Stothard, is at least as circumstantial as Blake's story preserved by Smith and Linnell.²⁵

The second question in dispute is whether, as Blake asserted to Linnell, Cromek actually commissioned him to design the *Canterbury Pilgrims*, with the promise of the engraving fee to follow. The issue is largely academic since, if the idea was Cromek's to begin with, he would have been within his rights to take the subject to Stothard if, after first proposing it to Blake, he had been dissatisfied with Blake's initial treatment of it—as indeed he would have been bewildered by the consciously archaic style Blake adopted for his design. However, it is significant that J. T. Smith, whose record of the affair in 1828 was based on first-hand discussion with a number of Blake's friends, made no reference to a commission; it was Allan Cunningham who first mentioned it two years later, simply to record Cromek's denial that he had ever given one.²⁶ A third question is whether Blake in fact made a pencil sketch of the subject in 1805 or early 1806, which would bolster though not clinch his claim that Cromek stole his idea. No drawing that can be so dated survives, though Gilchrist recounts a curious story con-



cerning such a sketch. Blake, as he tells it, hung his original design for the *Pilgrims* on his sitting room wall for perhaps a year before the appearance of Stothard's *Procession* in 1807; then on taking it down to use for his own fresco "he found it nearly effaced: the result of some malignant spell of Stothard's," as he insisted later to Flaxman, who naturally pooh-poohed the suggestion.²⁷ Since neither Smith nor Linnell mentioned this incident in his account of the affair, it may be another piece of the Blake apocrypha; but even if Blake made the charge to Flaxman, the story itself does not prove that an 1805 sketch ever existed. Yet interestingly enough, a drawing of the *Pilgrims* does survive whose appearance clearly indicates that it was hung on the wall as Gilchrist describes. This is the drawing of 1809 or 1810, soiled and faded and showing tack marks at top and bottom, which Blake made to reduce the design of his painting to the dimensions of his plate for engraving.²⁸ So Gilchrist's story may recall an actual conversation, though it is misleadingly vague as to the date. Either the exchange took place, as Gilchrist suggests, in 1807 or 1808, and Blake invoked Stothard's "malignant spell" to explain to Flaxman the absence of an earlier sketch of the subject that would prove his priority; or possibly the incident occurred some years later, when Blake could have pointed to the 1809–10 drawing as the "original design" from which Stothard had stolen his theme. In either event, the drawing remained as concrete evidence for Linnell or another informant to later convince Gilchrist of the truth of Blake's version of the case. One more point at issue, Crabb Robinson's vague recollection in 1852 of hearing some thirty years earlier of a prospectus for Blake's engraving circulated in 1806, proves a red herring on close inspection.²⁹

Beyond the unlikelihood of Blake's conceiving of the *Canterbury Pilgrims* in 1805, however, there are more positive reasons for linking the project to 1808, the date recorded on the painting. The first is Blake's probable motive in undertaking the Chaucer painting at this time. Nothing in Blake's art of 1805—predominantly Biblical themes in a recreation of his earlier neoclassic manner—provides a context for the Gothic style and realistic subject matter of the *Pilgrims*. But in 1807, his simmering resentment against Cromek and Schiavonetti over the Blair project, the success of Stothard's painting (which Schiavonetti had now been appointed to engrave), and Cromek's insolent challenge to "send me a better" evidently roused Blake to indignant protest, not only against Stothard's treatment of the subject but also against the whole system that produced it. For the



Pilgrims is not simply the most consciously archaic of all Blake's works: its archaism is not merely a style but a statement. The unholy alliance of publisher, painter, and engraver—Cromek, Stothard, and Schiavonetti—was to Blake the cause of the corruption of art in his time, in which increasingly the conception of a design was isolated from both its execution and, at one more remove, its reproduction, and the role of the artist increasingly subordinated to that of the entrepreneur. This system of production, which Morris Eaves has aptly named "the artistic machine," Blake saw reflected in the "broken lines" and mechanical techniques of Schiavonetti's stipple and mezzotint, to which Blake scornfully contrasted the integrity of his own linear style, the unbroken line which is the test of true artistry. As he wrote years later, "A Line is a Line in its Minutest Subdivision[s] Strait or Crooked It is Itself & Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else" (E 783). Thus his choice of the style he had learned from "Alb. Durer and the old Engravers" (E 572) was not a simple quest of historical accuracy, like the "antiquarian exactness" of Stothard's painting based on patient research in the British Museum; more significantly it was a return to the spirit of his uncorrupted youth, the Gothic world of Westminster Abbey and the medieval master craftsmen. Integrity of style was to be matched by integrity of production: Blake conceived his own vision of the *Pilgrims*, painted it, exhibited it, engraved it, advertised and sold it all on his own. "If a man is master of his profession," he wrote at the end of the *Descriptive Catalogue*, "and if he is not employed by



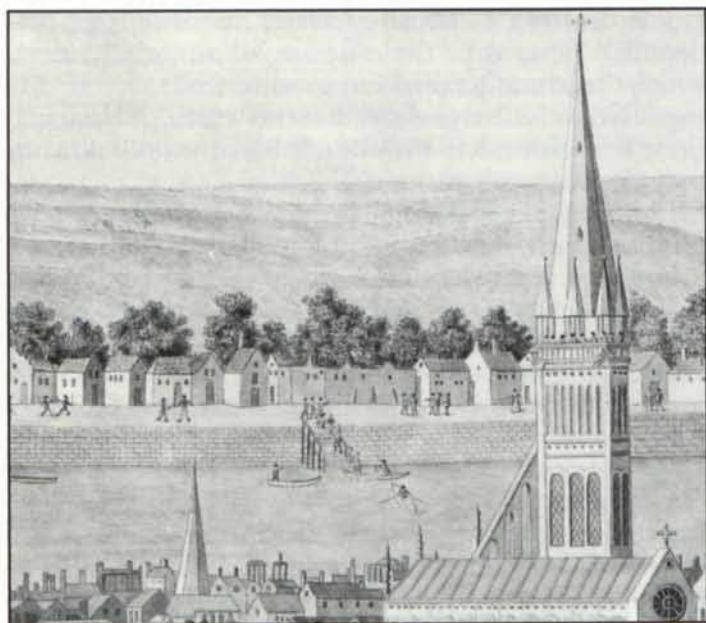
those who pretend to encourage art, he will employ himself and laugh in secret at the pretences of the ignorant" — thus gaining "a reward for the labours of the day, such as the world cannot give" (E 550). The *Canterbury Pilgrims* must be read as Blake's answer to Schiavonetti's facile virtuosity, Stothard's inauthentic medievalism, and Cromek's crass commercialism.

The most concrete evidence against the received account of the controversy, however, is found in Blake's published remarks on the affair. It is striking to note that nowhere in the *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809 does he charge Cromek with stealing his idea for the *Canterbury Pilgrims*. Rather, Blake tells us, his picture was painted "in self-defence against the insolent and envious imputation of unfitness for finished and scientific art." Cromek's rejection of his engraving for *The Grave* now seemed a slander on his abilities which, he hints, Cromek has "artfully and industriously endeavoured to be propagated among the public by ignorant hirelings," i.e., reviewers. He "courts comparison" with his competitors (Cromek and Stothard) and accuses Cromek of having reaped enormous profits from his designs for *The Grave* by employing another more docile engraver (Schiavonetti) to produce a work which has gained both of them "public patronage," while Blake's designs "which gained them that patronage are cried down as eccentricity and madness" (E 537–38). These outbursts spring partly from Blake's rage at the reviews of *The Grave* in the latter half of 1808 — first and foremost the

Hunts' *Examiner* — which attacked his designs as "indecent," "absurd," "the offspring of a morbid fancy" which "has totally failed" in its aim, while commending "the unrivalled graver of L. Schiavonetti." However, these were only salt in the wounds Blake was still nursing over Cromek's substitution of Schiavonetti as engraver, his failure to pay Blake what he now thought he deserved for his designs, his outrageous letter of May 1807, and a number of other grievances — now climaxed in Blake's imagination by Cromek's complicity in the reviewers' attacks.³⁰ But to all such aspersions and calumnies, he asserts, "the works now exhibited will give the lie." Following this defense with an attack, Blake links Stothard with "a class of men" — Reynolds and his followers in the Royal Academy — "whose whole art and science is fabricated for the purpose of destroying art," as Blake saw it, by promoting Venetian over Florentine principles, coloring over drawing; he then convicts such painters of "Stupidity" by a withering analysis of Stothard's *Procession* as described in his Prospectus (E 538–40).

In the *Public Address* of 1810 Blake extends these lines of attack and defense to his engraving of the *Pilgrims*, decrying the modern style of engraving of Bartolozzi and his followers as contaminated by painterly principles of tone, and upholding his own work as founded firmly on line. He rails especially against "the artfully propagated pretence" that "Great Inventors" such as himself "cannot Execute," or that "A Translation or a Copy of any kind" can be as good as "An Original Invention" — in short, that an engraver such as Schiavonetti can do justice to Blake's own designs (E 572, 576, 582). Clearly his humiliation over the Blair illustrations is still as much on his mind as his need to promote his Chaucer engraving; but even if his protest against his competitors' "Calumny & the Arts of Trading Combination" (E 577) is read as referring to the dispute over the *Pilgrims* rather than to *The Grave*, still it attacks Cromek not for stealing his original idea but for maligning his abilities and for promoting Stothard's painting far more successfully than Blake did his own.³¹

The failure of the 1809 Exhibition, followed by that of the Chaucer engraving (of which he may have sold only seven or eight copies out of a printing of thirty or so),³² was a staggering blow, the climax of a long series of disappointments and (as he saw them) betrayals since the end of 1805. In the epigrams Blake began scribbling in his Notebook at about this time, Cromek is prominent among the "foes" on whom he vents his rage: but the terms of his attack deserve close scrutiny. Cromek is



denounced as "a petty sneaking knave," who loves the art only of cheating, and who in trying "to please everybody" has "set to work Both ignorance and skill" — i.e., has employed Schiavonetti to engrave Blake's designs for *The Grave* rather than Blake himself. The one possible reference to the *Canterbury Pilgrims* affair — and a murky one at that — occurs in the enigmatic poem "And his legs carried it like a long fork" (E 503–04). This poem, begun late in 1810, apparently celebrates Blake's publication of his Chaucer engraving ahead of Stothard's, thereby frustrating the schemes of Screwmuch (Cromek), Steward (Stothard), and Assassinetti (Schiavonetti) to cheat Blake out of a just reward for his talents. Though Cromek has peddled Stothard's painting the length and breadth of Great Britain, it has been to no avail. His "eggs" (the profits from the exhibition of Stothard's painting) have been "addled and decayed" by Schiavonetti's death in June 1810 before finishing the engraving which would have proved still more lucrative to Cromek, while at the same time he has failed to turn "the wretched soul of William Blake" into "eggs of gold" for his own profit. And when Cromek, almost penniless, died of tuberculosis in 1812, Blake added some lines savagely exulting over his demise as well as the deaths or misfortunes of other enemies and some former friends — an alarming index to his state of mind at the time.³³

Yet it is striking that Stothard, Flaxman, and Hayley come in for more frequent and violent abuse in the Notebook poems than Cromek.³⁴ Stothard is compared to "The Fox, the Owl, the Beetle & the Bat" and is attacked as "the golden fool" who has "grown old and rich" by observing "the golden rule," the seeming "friend of all mankind" who is in truth iron-hearted, wooden-headed, brazen-faced (E 508, 503). These verses express Blake's resentment of Stothard's financial success and his coolness to an old friend, however, rather than raise any charge of plagiarism. The animus against Stothard seems excessive, especially in the light of Stothard's cordiality in 1806, when he is said to have promised to include a portrait of Blake among his *Pilgrims* "as a mark of esteem for him and his works."³⁵ When his painting appeared in 1807 it contained no such portrait: but this would hardly account for Blake's anger. Perhaps Stothard in an expansive moment actually promised Blake the commission for engraving his work — a promise that Cromek would have forced him to withdraw. Such a hypothesis would at least account for the mysterious commission of a Chaucer engraving which Blake believed he had received but which Cromek denied he had ever given. Blake goes on in the Notebook to link Stothard with Flaxman as his two Calibans, treacherous "old acquaintance" whom he "taught to see" but who now "have shewn their backsides," and who spread the poisonous rumor that "Blakified drawing spoils painter & engraver" (E 508, 505). The assault on Flaxman, the innocent bystander, is surprising. Like Stothard he is accused of copying Blake; but a more frequent accusation is that he has refused to believe Blake and demanded "a proof of what he can't perceive," mocking Blake as a "madman" — who replies by calling him a "blockhead" (E 507, 501). Perhaps this exchange of insults was precipitated by Flaxman's refusal to believe Blake's improbable story of Stothard's casting a "malignant spell" on his original sketch of the *Pilgrims* when Flaxman quizzed him, as he must have done, on his reason for apparently copying Stothard's design.³⁶

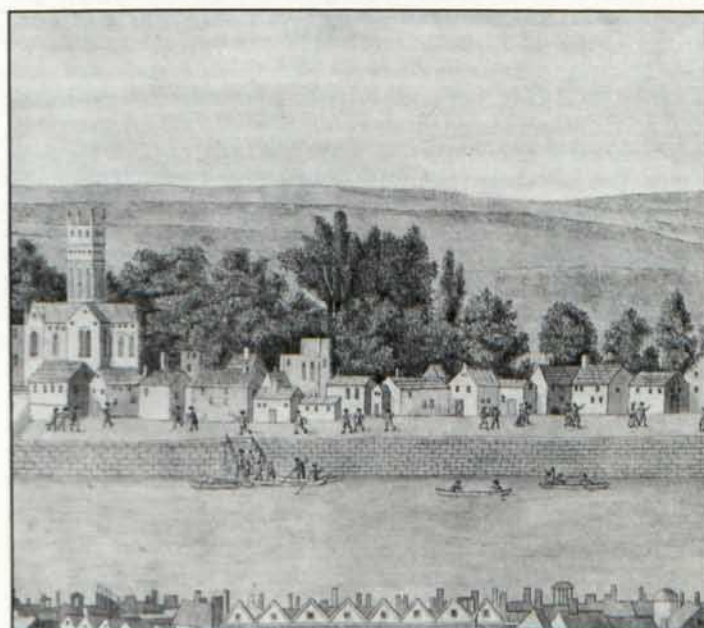
Thus we are faced like Flaxman, and later J. T. Smith, with the difficult question of how far we can take Blake's word against Cromek and Stothard's in the matter. Discounting the story of supernatural influences on the mysterious pencil sketch of 1805, how much can we believe of the account Blake gave Linnell that Cromek saw his drawing of the *Pilgrims*, commissioned him to paint it for twenty guineas, promised him the engraving fee in addition while secretly negotiating with another

engraver, then "sneaked" the idea to Stothard when Blake refused to surrender his design? This account, as we have seen, is backed by no external evidence and indeed conflicts with most of the facts surrounding the matter. It is possible, of course, that Linnell's recollection in 1855 of his conversations with Blake around 1820 is at fault. Like Smith's memoir of 1828 his note on the affair contains some factual inaccuracies, and in certain details—notably the promise of the engraving commission subsequently withdrawn—it suspiciously resembles the episode of the *Grave* illustrations, belonging also to the fall of 1805, which may have fused with it in Linnell's memory.³⁷ But, given Blake's emotional state around 1809 and after, it seems more likely that this fusion or confusion had already taken place in Blake's mind when he talked with Linnell a decade or so after the event, and that this is the real origin of the story. Blake's version of the affair is thus probably a gradual reconfiguration of the events during his years of obscurity after 1810, when he had alienated all of his old friends and was left to brood over their injustices in isolation.³⁸ In either case, when all the contemporary evidence is taken into account the contemporary understanding of the coincidence between the two Chaucer paintings seems the probable one—that Blake commenced his picture in rivalry to Stothard's (*BR* 492, 209, 243–44). No disinterested witness at the time supports Blake's claim to priority, and the factual evidence all points in the other direction.

The difficult question remains of how Blake arrived at his conviction that the idea for the Chaucer painting was originally his; and an answer here must be almost completely speculative. It must start from the premise that Blake lived in an eidetic world, thronged with precise visual images having the force of reality, with a visual memory developed to an unusual degree by his training in art and well-stocked with years of study of the work of other artists. Many of his apparently original designs have been shown to be based on (probably unconscious) recollections of other works, both contemporary and ancient, from a wide range of sources—which is not to deny that what he borrowed from other artists he transmuted into something wholly his own.³⁹ Like many of his other paintings, then, the *Pilgrims* may well have been an amalgamation of half-conscious memories of other works under the pressure of some immediate stimulus. It may well be that, as has been suggested, Blake saw the Elgin Marbles not long after they were placed on exhibition in 1807 and this visual experience—especially in

conjunction with his view of Stothard's *Procession* around the same time—was the seed of his own conception. The sight of the actual Marbles would certainly have brought to the surface of his memory the line engravings of the Panathenaic Procession reproduced in Stuart and Revett's *Antiquities of Athens*, which he had studied as a young man and which are closer in feeling to his own work than the sculptures themselves. But quite apart from the Marbles, Stothard's procession evidently triggered a recollection of two other cavalcades—those of two outsized engravings by Basire which have been claimed were the primary influences on both the scale and the archaic style of his *Pilgrims*—"The Field of the Cloth of Gold" (1774) and "The Procession of Edward VI" (1787), the latter of which was especially close to Blake's design.⁴⁰ It seems, then, that from all these recollections fusing in his visual memory arose a new image of the same compelling vividness as the spiritual publications he described years later to Crabb Robinson, to which the existence of actual manuscripts was irrelevant—one of "those wonderful Originals seen in my visions" before he ever set pencil to paper.⁴¹ Thus Stothard's cavalcade would have appeared to him as a copy of an idea he had long had in mind, which he gradually became convinced he had sketched a year or two before seeing Stothard's painting in progress.

In conclusion, two points must be made. First, it appears that Cromeck has been "much maligned," as William Bell Scott, a Victorian collector and editor of Blake's engravings, later opined. From Gilchrist onward he has been described as "slippery," "greedy," "treacherous," an opportunist who "picked the brains of his proteges and stopped the pay."⁴² Partly this may be due to the fact that the role of artistic and literary entre-



preneur was still relatively new and not highly regarded in Blake's time;⁴³ it is also true that Cromek, who seems to have operated on a very narrow margin of cash, was not generous in his dealings and engaged in sharp and perhaps shady practices. Cromek was no hero: he was quick-tempered, brash, disingenuous, and drove a hard bargain though to no great financial return. Yet it has been claimed in the light of recent evidence that he also showed "a surprising breadth of aesthetic and intellectual sympathy" with Blake in the earlier stage of their relationship; moreover, that he was the most reliable and conscientious of Robert Burns's nineteenth-century editors as well as an enterprising and energetic collector of unpublished material.⁴⁴ Cromek's career as a whole awaits reassessment; in his relationship with Blake he should at the very least be given credit for introducing Blake's art to the widest public he was to have in his lifetime with the designs to *The Grave*, and doing everything in his power to ensure the success of the work.

Yet a more significant point emerges when we shift from looking at the quarrel with Cromek through the eyes of Blake to viewing Blake through the perspective of the quarrel. Blake seems to have been driven to the edge of sanity in the years surrounding his exhibition. As Bentley has suggested, between 1807 and 1812 the visionary world seemed often to supplant rather than to supplement the ordinary world of causality in Blake's mind, or—to put it another way—"a firm persuasion

that a thing is so, [seemed to] make it so."⁴⁵ His relationship with Cromek is perhaps the most telling example of his loosening grip on reality during those years, though few of his readers have been willing to see it thus. Yet the belief which apparently began to grow on him after 1810 that Cromek and Stothard had stolen his idea for a painting from Chaucer is no more delusive than a number of other suspicions of his friends and foes that he vented at the time.⁴⁶ But there is more to it than this. If Blake was in his Spectre's power in his dealings with Cromek, his Humanity was also awake and struggling, like Los, to subdue it to the ends of art. It is one of the mysteries of creativity that the imagination feeds on contraries, is stirred by the experience of hate as well as love, by scorn and rivalry as well as admiration and brotherhood, perhaps even by the petty as well as the sublime. We know what the years at Felpham with Hayley contributed to the making of *Milton*. Robert Cromek must have appeared to Blake as "the Age's Knave," the reincarnation of Chaucer's Pardoner, the man "sent in every age for a rod and scourge," but "suffered by Providence for wise ends." It is then a providential irony that Blake's conviction of Cromek's villainy prompted him to paint one of his grandest "Visions of the eternal principles or characters of human life [which] appear to poets, in all ages" (E 535–36). Seen thus, Cromek indeed had "his great use, and his grand leading destiny."

⁴³ As reprinted in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969; hereafter cited as *BR*) 464–67 and 491–92. On the 1808 date of Blake's painting, now obscured, see W. M. Rossetti, "Annotated Lists of Blake's Paintings, Drawings, and Engravings," in Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, "Pictor Ignotus" (London: Macmillan, 1906) 428, and Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981) 1: 475; on the 1817 date of Stothard's engraving, see Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, ed. Ruthven Todd (London: Everyman, 1945; hereafter cited as *Life*) 253–55 and *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Oxford UP, 1917, hereafter cited as *DNB*) 18: 1322. Duncan Macmillan's suggestion that Blake got the idea of the cavalcade from viewing the Elgin Marbles ("Blake's Exhibition and Catalogue Reconsidered" *Blake Newsletter* 5 [1971–72]: 205–06) supports the 1808 date, since the Marbles were not unpacked and placed on private view till 1807 (David Irwin, *John Flaxman 1755–1826* [London: Cassell, 1979] 174).

⁴⁴ To cite only a few: Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake*, 3rd ed. rev.; Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 232–34; Ruthven Todd, *William Blake, the Artist* (London: Studio Vista Ltd., 1971) 78; David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (3rd rev. ed., Princeton UP, 1977) 439; David Bindman, *Blake as*

an Artist (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977) 155; Jack Lindsay, *William Blake* (New York: Braziller, 1979) 193; Butlin 1: 475; and Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 84.

⁴⁵ *Life* 223–25; *BR* 184–87, 464n1. The letter was published by Allan Cunningham's son in 1852 (*BR* 187n2), and thereby prompted Gilchrist to cast Cromek as the villain of the piece. Stothard's painting was the sensation of the 1807 season in London, drawing crowds of thousands at a shilling admission, and subsequently toured the provinces with similar success. The engraving, despite its delayed appearance, became the best-selling print of the first half of the nineteenth century (Anna E. Bray, *Life of Thomas Stothard* [London, 1851] 140).

⁴⁶ Erdman 439; *BR* 179; see also *Life* 220.

⁴⁷ *BR* 465–66 and n1, and see 179n3. On the novelty of the subject, which—pace Gilchrist (*Life* 221)—greatly intensified the rivalry, see Richard D. Altick, *Paintings from Books* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1985) 339. Betsy Bowden in "The Artistic and Interpretive Context of Blake's 'Canterbury Pilgrims'" *Blake* 13 (1980): 164–90 examines in detail a number of analogues to Blake's design in previous illustrations of the *Tales*; but the single illustration she cites (172, 174–75) of the Pilgrims setting out on their journey, from Urry's 1721 edition of Chaucer, barely qualifies as a source for Blake's painting, even though Blake may have known of this edition. Only

11 of the tiny figures in the $7\frac{1}{2}'' \times 3\frac{3}{4}''$ engraving are identifiable, much less individualized, and the overall design and graphic style are completely different from Blake's. The figures of the Merchant and the Wife of Bath in the Chaucer portrait of the "Heads of the Poets" (Butlin, vol. 2, pl. 440), which she cites as "faithful copies" from Urry, are totally unlike their counterparts in the *Pilgrims*.

⁶On Linnell and Smith's inaccuracies, see note 37 below. Butlin, citing Bentley (BR 220), states that Stothard's engraving appeared before Blake's "in about November 1809" (1: 475), while Anthony Blunt (*The Art of William Blake* [New York: Columbia UP, 1959] 77), followed by Kathleen Raine (*William Blake* [New York: Praeger, 1970] 169), states that Cromek "published an engraving after Stothard's painting, with great profit to himself." But only the preliminary etching was completed by Schiavonetti in 1809, a few months before his death, and the engraving did not appear till five years after Cromek's death in 1812.

⁷Dennis M. Read, "The Context of Blake's 'Public Address': Cromek and The Chalcographic Society" *Philological Quarterly* 60 (1981): 70-75, 80-81.

⁸Cromek's figure, disputed by Bentley: whose claim that Blake was "riding the crest of a wave of prosperity" in the autumn of 1805 (BR 173) must, however, be questioned. He estimates Blake's income for the first ten months of 1805 at £98, or £2.3 a week (186n1). But apart from payments by Flaxman and Butts totalling £37.18 (571-72) there is only a very doubtful commission of 10 guineas from Joseph Thomas in September (166, 606 and G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1977], hereafter cited as *BB*, 420n1) beside a still more doubtful 50 guineas for the plates to the 1805 edition of the *Ballads* promised him by the publisher Phillips under a profit-sharing agreement. (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman [hereafter cited as *E*] 762-65). To prove this was actually paid Bentley cites a letter of 25 April 1805 (BR 161, 186n1—actually by Phillips not Blake), but the payment is not mentioned in the letter as quoted (161-62). Blake's letters from June to December 1805 (E 765-67) indicate he was in constant want of cash and had heard nothing from Phillips since the *Ballads* were published in June: the 1805 venture was apparently as much of a financial loss as the 1802 *Ballads* had been (BR 116-17). His final word on the subject is the epigram on Phillips: "He loved me and for no Gain at all / But to rejoice & triumph in my fall" (E 505). It seems, then, that Blake's income for the ten months leading up to Cromek's offer was probably not much over £40. From Bentley's figures for the following year (BR 574-75, 606, 617), his income for 1806 came to about £55. Blake's increasing poverty was an important factor in his state of mind in 1807 and afterward.

⁹On the ideology of Blake's opposition to the newer techniques, see Morris Eaves, "Blake and the Artistic Machine: An Essay in Decorum and Technology" *PMLA* 92 (1977): 907 and 915n16.

¹⁰BR 193-94 and n1, 197, 200, 54-55, 173-74. Blake was commissioned to engrave only one plate out of the 100 included in Boydell's illustrated *Shakespeare* (BB 535-36). Between April 1805 and 1813 he received only a single engraving commission—the plate for Prince Hoare's *Inquiry into the . . . Arts* (1806) BR 571, 616-17 and n1).

¹¹On Cromek's background, see *DNB* 5: 144 and the "Biographical Sketch of Robert Hartley Cromek" in Robert Blair, *The Grave, A Poem* (London, 1813) 45-54. On his friendship with the Flaxmans, see Irwin 189; on his friendship with Cumberland, see BR 198. Flaxman thought his engravings from Stothard "in beauty far exceed any other prints from that Artist's works" (Wilson 222n)—i.e., including Blake's; see also BR 154-55.

¹²BR 168. Contrary to the usual interpretation of the agreement, Blake's letter implies that in September 1805 Cromek merely commissioned "a set of drawings," and that the engraving was not agreed on till November. On the other hand, a letter by Flaxman to Hayley of 18 October 1805 (BR 166-67) reports that Cromek had proposed that Blake engrave 20 of his original 40 drawings, but it is not clear whether Flaxman had this information from Cromek or from Blake. Cromek's fee of a guinea for each finished drawing is what Blake was receiving from Butts for his tempera frescoes at this time.

¹³See BR 168-71 for the second prospectus; the first prospectus of November 1805, naming Blake as the engraver, was not discovered and printed till G. E. Bentley, Jr.'s article "Blake and Cromek: The Wheat and the Tares" *Modern Philology* 71 (1974): 367-69. This discovery, along with a letter by Cromek to James Montgomery of April 1807 speaking warmly of Blake (372-75), considerably softened Bentley's earlier criticism of Cromek (BR 168-71 *et passim*). Butlin, who like Bentley notes that the type of the second prospectus was only partly reset (in fact only three lines were altered and three added), suggests (1: 454) that it was issued some time after Blake's letter to Hayley of 11 December 1805, which thanked him for his "kind Reception" of the "New Projected Work" and said nothing of the commission being given to Schiavonetti (E 766-67). Since the first proof of Schiavonetti's first etching (also of "Death's Door") was dated 12 February 1806, it appears that Schiavonetti was appointed and the prospectus revised in late December or January.

¹⁴On Blake's innovative technique, see Robert N. Essick, *William Blake Printmaker* (Princeton UP, 1980) 107; on Cromek's reaction, see BR 172, and Robert N. Essick and Morton D. Paley, *Robert Blair's The Grave Illustrated by William Blake* (London: Scholar Press, 1982) 18. Blake's and Schiavonetti's versions of "Death's Door" are reproduced by Todd 76-77 and by Eaves 920-21. Essick also suggests that Cromek turned to Schiavonetti because he found Blake's use of perspective faulty in another drawing ("A Preliminary Design for Blake's *Grave*" *Blake Studies* 4 [1972]: 11).

¹⁵BR 468. Even Gilchrist, who was mainly responsible for the blackening of Cromek's character, admits that the change was "a happy choice of engravers on Cromek's part; . . . indeed, Schiavonetti's engravings introduced Blake's designs to a wider public than himself could ever have done" (*Life* 219). Todd 84 suggests that in refusing to work in a more acceptable style Blake "may have been more blameworthy than has usually been admitted."

¹⁶On the customary copyright arrangements for engravings in Blake's time, see David Alexander and Richard T. Godfrey, *Painters and Engraving: The Reproductive Print from Hogarth to Wilkie* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1980) 11-12. On Cromek's "jockeying" see *Life* 217-19.

¹⁷BR 52. On the "not unusual" disproportion between the designer's and engraver's fees and the publisher's profits, Alexander and Godfrey cite the example of the highly successful print of *The Destruction of the Children of Niobe*, in which Richard Wilson received 80 guineas for his 1761 painting, Woollett £150 for the engraving, and Boydell collected £2,000 for the sale of the prints (*Painters and Engravers* 24). As for the 537 *Night Thoughts* watercolors, Edwards's brother Thomas tried to sell them for 50 guineas in 1826 and 1828, but without success (BR 442n1).

¹⁸Raine 169: BR 184n3.

¹⁹On Schiavonetti's fee, see Bentley's corrected figure in "Blake and Cromek" 378; on the subscription price, *BR* 171 and Dennis M. Read, "Cromek's Provincial Advertisements for Blake's *Grave*" *Notes and Queries* ns 27 (1980) 75; on Cromek's travels, *ibid.* 73–75 and Bentley "Blake and Cromek" 378–79.

²⁰Using Bentley's estimates of printing, advertising, and selling costs (*BR* 184n3), plus an additional £280 for the engraving fee, gives total costs for *The Grave* of £1,209.2.6. Sales of 680 subscriptions at two guineas and 20 nonsubscription copies at 2½ guineas, with perhaps five proof copies at four guineas (*BR* 191), yield a total of 1430 guineas or £1501.10, making an estimated net profit of £292.7.6 (not counting travel expenses). Some copies remained unsold at least five months after publication (*BR* 213–14).

²¹See G. E. Bentley, Jr., "The Promotion of Blake's *Grave* Designs" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 31 (1962): 34–53; Read, "Advertisements" 73–75. To these efforts should be added Cromek's persuading Malkin to include an encomium of Blake's art and poetry and a puff for *The Grave* in the preface to his *Father's Memoir of His Child* (Bentley "Promotion" 348), as well as commissioning Thomas Phillips R.A. to paint Blake's portrait (engraved by Schiavonetti) for a frontispiece to the volume. And in 1807 and 1808 Cromek, professing admiration of his "Noble though extravagant Flights" ("Blake and Cromek" 372), was apparently trying to find buyers for some of Blake's earlier books (*BR* 191 and n1). However, as Essick and Paley point out, all Cromek's "bustling and puffing" could not produce favorable reviews of *The Grave*: only one mildly positive one and two long negative ones are known (*The Grave* 25; *BR* 195ff., 199ff., 201ff.).

²²See *Life* 95. Excepting the illuminated books and *The Gates of Paradise*, only 17 or 18 of the more than 600 plates engraved by Blake during his lifetime were done on his own initiative, not on commission; and of these he published under his own copyright only five: "Edward & Elenor," "Job," "Ezekiel," and "The Accusers" (all dated 1793–94), and in 1810 "Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims" (Essick *Plates* 3–122 *passim*). *Milton* and possibly *Jerusalem*, begun probably about this time, were of course independent large-scale projects from which Blake expected no financial reward proportionate to his investment of time: presumably they would have occupied all the attention he had left for unremunerative work.

²³This single reference to Chaucer outside the *Descriptive Catalogue*, the *Public Address*, and the 1809–10 prospectuses for the Chaucer engraving contrasts significantly with Blake's frequent mention of other poets: Milton (61, excluding references in *Milton*), Shakespeare (20), Dryden (10), Chatterton (7), Spenser (6), Pope (5), and Gray (5): see *A Concordance to the Writings of William Blake* ed. David V. Erdman, 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967) *passim*. It is often assumed that Blake was familiar with Chaucer from his earliest years (see e.g., Michael Phillips "Blake and the 'Unincreasable Club'" *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 80 (1976): 30, and Robert Gleckner, *Blake's Prelude* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1982] 137). But neither Phillips nor Gleckner in their studies of Blake's early poetry demonstrates any Chaucerian influence; and Karl Kiralis, noting his erratic transcriptions in the *Catalogue*, questions his later knowledge of the *Tales* ("William Blake

as an Intellectual and Spiritual Guide to Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims" *Blake Studies* 1 [1969]: 171–74). It is significant that in quoting a line from Dryden's translation of "The Knight's Tale" in *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* Blake attributed it to Dryden rather than Chaucer (see *The Notebook of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman [Oxford: Clarendon, 1973] N69). Though Chaucer was included among the "Heads of the Poets" which he painted for Hayley's library, these portraits clearly reflect Hayley's choice rather than Blake's own (Butlin 1: 297; Bindman 133–34). On his debt to Dryden see S. Foster Damon *A Blake Dictionary* (New York: Dutton, 1971) 78–79; on his wavering admiration for Chaucer see Essick *Plates* 68–69, 87.

²⁴Bentley "Blake and Cromek" 372. Bentley's discovery of this letter prompted both Erdman (518) and Lindsay (193) to raise the possibility that the original idea for the *Pilgrims* was indeed Cromek's.

²⁵"Biographical Sketch" in Blair (1813) xlvi. On Godwin's biography see Caroline Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion* (Cambridge UP, 1925) 1: ciii, cxi and *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) 2: 951, 1054. It is significant that the minutely detailed description of the social-historical background for which Godwin's work was generally praised (Spurgeon 2: 9–19, 31–37) is the same "antiquarian exactness" for which Stothard's painting was acclaimed (see the "Prospectus" for the engraving of Stothard's *Procession* in Blair *The Grave* [London: 1808] [38]—to which Blake's rather Johnsonian praise of Chaucer's universality was diametrically opposed).

²⁶*BR* 464–65, 491. While Cunningham's memoir of Blake is unreliable in a number of details, it is likely to be accurate in his account of Cromek, whom he knew well from his mildly discreditable part in the *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, published by Cromek in 1809–10 (*Life* 250–52).

²⁷*Life* 241. Wilson insists (235) that Blake was jesting when he made this remark, if indeed he did: but it is in keeping with other wild accusations Blake made during these years (see note 46 below).

²⁸Butlin 1 no. 654, 2 pl. 880. The verso is inscribed by Tatham, who inherited the drawing from Catherine Blake, "The Original reduced Drawing made to reduce the Picture of the Canterbury Pilgrims to the size of the Plate Blake afterwards engraved." Linnell, who probably relayed the story to Gilchrist, was evidently aware of the drawing's existence but not of its date: perhaps because Tatham wrote his note shortly before offering it for sale in 1862 or, as Morton Paley has suggested in correspondence, because Linnell, whose relations with Tatham were strained, was given no opportunity to examine it.

²⁹*BR* 538, 179 and n3.

³⁰*BR* 195–97, 199–208, 209–10. Blake's grievances include Cromek's insistence on re-engraving Blake's plate for the frontispiece to Malkin's *Memoir* in 1806 (Dennis M. Read, "A New Blake Engraving: Gilchrist and the Cromek Connection" *Blake* 14 [1980]: 64); his failure to mention Blake by name in several of the advertisements to *The Grave* (Bentley, "Promotion" 351); his failure to acknowledge Blake's contribution in his prefatory advertisement to *The Grave* while praising Schiavonetti's engravings (*BR* 192–93); his omission of Blake's name from the title page (*BR* 529); and his inclusion of a glowing prospectus for the engraving of Stothard's *Procession* at the end of the volume, announcing the patronage of the Prince of Wales for the print (Blair [1808] 37).

³¹The one allusion to "robbery" in the *Public Address* is a veiled reference to alleged borrowings much earlier in his career by Stothard and Flaxman (E 582; see 508, 540). Other references in the *Descriptive Catalogue* and *Public Address* to "imitation," "copy," "original," "thieves," and "plagiarism" are not directed at Cromek or Stothard at all, nor are there any to "steal" or "cheat."

³²Essick (*Plates* 60–70) lists 29 prints made during Blake's lifetime. Actual sales in Blake's lifetime are recorded for only about seven copies (BR 592 and 594, and Essick *Plates* 63, 64, 75, 76). The price was set at four guineas to subscribers in the 1809 prospectus ("to be considerably raised to Non-subscribers," E 567), lowered to three guineas in 1810, and sold for two or 2½ guineas in 1826–28 (BR 592, 594–95, 607). The first three obituaries of Blake failed to mention the *Pilgrims* among his other works; the fourth described it as though it were unknown (BR 348–50, 351–53, 354–55, 357).

³³The "enemies" include "Billy's Lawyer" Rose — "Sweet Rose" (E 759) — his old friend Flaxman, and his erstwhile employer Prince Hoare as well as the brothers Hunt and the villainous dragoon Scholfield, who died in 1812 (BR 669). "Dady Jack Hamps Parson" may be the Rev. Joseph Thomas, a friend of Flaxman's and a generous patron to Blake, who died in 1811 (BR 674). "Dady" or "daddy" was a current term of contempt for a prim old man (see BR 53). "Cur, my Lawyer" is probably Charles Ker, a barrister with whom Blake was embroiled in a lawsuit in 1810, and whose father lost a famous and expensive lawsuit in 1812 (see BR 227–28 and n3).

³⁴Cromek is mentioned in nine of the epigrams, Hayley in 10, and Stothard and Flaxman in 11 each (under their respective aliases in "And his legs carried it like a long fork,") (Erdman *Concordance* s.v.)

³⁵*Life* 221.

³⁶Flaxman evidently had a falling-out with Blake in 1808, which seems to have lasted till 1814 or 1815: see BR 190, 241–422, 235, 239 and BB 419.

³⁷Linnell accepts Smith's misstatement that Blake himself had the original idea for the *Grave* illustrations and has Blake starting work on his Chaucer engraving in 1806 (BR 464 and n1), two years before completing his painting and three years before he started to engrave it (E 567–68). The coincidences between the Blair and the Chaucer projects in Linnell's account are the commission with the 20 guinea fee for the designs; the promise on which Cromek reneged that Blake would do the engraving; and the negotiations behind Blake's back with another engraver.

³⁸Gilchrist's statement (*Life* 247) that "to the end of his life" Blake would abuse Stothard to strangers with "unaccountable vehemence," while keeping silent to friends and sympathizers about the affair, suggests that he sensed his side of the story would not bear close examination.

³⁹See the discussions by C. H. Collins Baker, "The Sources of Blake's Pictorial Expression" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 4 (1940): 359–67; Blunt 33–43; and *Blake in His Time*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978) *passim*. On Blake's eideticism see Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 202–05, and Joseph Burke, "The Eidetic and the Borrowed Image: An Interpretation of Blake's Theory and Practice of Art" in *The Visionary Hand*, ed. Robert N. Essick (Los Angeles: Hennessy and Ingalls, 1973) 263–67, 271–77.

⁴⁰Laurence Binyon, *The Engraved Designs of William Blake* (London: Benn, 1926) 62, and Essick *Printmaker* 189–90, which provides a detailed comparison of Basire's and Blake's engraving technique. As is apparent from the reproduction, the compositional similarities between Basire's print and Blake's are far closer than those suggested to the Elgin Marbles (see note 1 above). In addition to the frieze-like arrangement of the figures with near-isocephaly noted by Essick, Blake's design closely parallels Basire's in the gently rolling hills and dense foliage of the trees in the background; in the architectural details of diamond-paned windows, Gothic spires and gateway, and pillars enclosing sculptures of ecclesiastics; and most of all in the horses and their trappings, an unlikely subject for Blake. The similarities to the Parthenon frieze adduced by Macmillan (see note 1 above) are generalized and remote by comparison — not only the human figures but especially the horses. In the Panathenaic procession the horses with their bare-back riders move from right to left in a bounding canter, tossing their heads, with both forefeet usually off the ground; the London cavalcade moves from left to right at a dignified walk or slow trot. Blake's improbable rendition of Chaucer's horse with both left feet off the ground at the same moment may result from his amalgamation of the front and rear ends of two horses at the rear of the mounted procession in Basire's print, each partly obscured by a pillar: which suggests that he may have refreshed his memory by another view of the print. Its heroic dimensions (22¾ x 52½ inches) are only slightly larger than those of Blake's engraving (18¾ x 53½ inches).

⁴¹BR 322; E 531. On the indebtedness of such "original" visions to recollections of earlier images, see Morton D. Paley, "Wonderful Originals" — Blake and Ancient Sculpture" in *Blake in His Time* 170–97.

⁴²*Life* 221, 250, 244, 252. See Wilson 227 ("a second-rate engraver"), Bernard Blackstone, *English Blake* (Cambridge UP, 1949) 123 ("an exploiter more unscrupulous and more cunning than Hayley"), and so forth. Essick and Paley give evidence of his hard dealings with other business associates (*Blair's Grave* 18), and Bentley even blames "the obscurity and poverty of Blake's last years" on Cromek for discouraging Blake "from appealing directly to the public" ("Blake and Cromek" 375–76). Dennis M. Read, who has published valuable research on Cromek's career, has raised doubts in correspondence about several of the charges leveled against him by Gilchrist, such as Cromek's stealing an autograph letter by Ben Jonson from Sir Walter Scott (*Life* 252–53) and failing to pay Stothard the extra £40 promised for his *Procession* (253). On Cromek's financial difficulties over the engraving of Stothard's picture, see Read, "Engraving" 60–65; on W. B. Scott see BR 193 and Todd in *Life* 384, 386.

⁴³The first recorded use of the term *entrepreneur* in the sense of "manager" occurs in 1828: "an animal whom it is supposed lawful and commendable to bleed at every vein" (OED Supplement).

⁴⁴Bentley "Blake and Cromek" 366, 376–77; J. DeLancey Ferguson, "In Defense of R. H. Cromek" *Philological Quarterly* 9 (1930): 239–48; and Dennis M. Read, "Practicing 'The Necessity of Purification': Cromek, Roscoe, and *Reliques of Burns*" *Studies in Bibliography* 35 (1982): 306–19. Essick and Paley cite the "surprisingly Blakean . . . rhetoric" of Cromek's 1810 obituary of Schiavonetti, which must have struck Blake with considerable irony (*Blair's Grave* 28–29).

⁴⁵BR 180; E 38. It is significant that the idiosyncratic word "delusion" in its several forms occurs only twice in Blake's work before *The Four Zoas* and 54 times thereafter (*Concordance* s.v.). It appears that Blake recognized in his own experience the power of hallucinatory images to take on the force of reality.

⁴⁶Blake's complaint that his designs have been rejected by the Royal Academy merely because they were painted in watercolor (E 527; see Erdman 455n57); his statement that Cromek made over 1400 guineas profit on *The Grave* (E 537); his insinuation that Cromek was responsible for the death of Schiavonetti (E 505); his claim that Flaxman "was blasting my character as an Artist to Macklin, my Employer" in 1782-83 (E 572; see BR 610-11), the very time at which Flaxman was finding influential patrons for Blake, arranging for the printing of *Poetical Sketches*, assisting in a plan to send Blake abroad, and generally promoting his reputation (ibid.

24-27). Blake's sneer at Hayley for "being a friend just in the nick" to Cowper (E 507)—i.e., for neglecting Cowper's needs and doubting his genius while alive but capitalizing on his fame after his death by writing his biography on a commission from "some bookseller"—is unfair and inaccurate: see Morchard Bishop, *Blake's Hayley* (London: Gollancz, 1951) 152-85, 217-25, 252-53 on Hayley's long drawn-out campaign to secure a pension for Cowper, his extraordinary efforts to rescue Cowper from depression, and his attempts to persuade the Rev. John Johnson and Lady Hesketh to write Cowper's biography until Lady Hesketh, Cowper's cousin, insisted that he was the proper person to do it. Blake's accusation that Hayley "when he could not act upon my wife / Hired a Villain to be-reave my Life" (E 506) is, in the light of Hayley's generous assistance to Blake at the time of his trial, paranoiac.

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