William Blake’s Modern-day Influence on the Visual Word: A Work in Progress

Elliott Kidd, Department of English, College of Arts and Sciences & Honors College
Faculty Mentor: David Taylor, Department of English, College of Arts and Sciences

Abstract

William Blake is a well-known name in Romantic British poetic literature. His written works include (but are not limited to) *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *The Four Zoas*, and *Milton* as well as numerous illustrations. The effect of this gifted man’s work is so great that many have been inspired by his legacy, from later writers and artists of the Romantic period, to those of contemporary culture. This research will focus on the more recent time and will show the ways other artists were influenced by his work. The purpose is to trace Blake’s presence in media that combine visual and written aspects in the same work (as Blake’s own art often did) in order to assess the degree of his work’s impact on those areas. Most of the research will center on graphic novels and comic books, which, being most similar to his own approach, are ideally suited for discussing William Blake.

Works Cited


Background

Videre Verba are two Latin words that translate “to see words” however, it will serve dual meaning for my purposes as it will also describe an under appreciated art form that uses both written words and visual images to involve its audience at a higher level. William Blake often used Videre Verba to express his art during the Romantic period of the late 1700s and early 1800s. Blake would etch with acid both the images and words of many of his most famous works in order to create the desired effect. Though in contemporary times most users of Videre Verba have abandoned etching as a media, some were still greatly influenced by Blake and drew inspiration from his work. Many creators of comic books, graphic novels, and even some children’s books looked at and read William Blake’s art and chose his Videre Verba style as a fitting method for their own projects. Because Blake’s own work is mirrored and alluded to in modern pieces, it is clear that Blake is influential.

In order to grasp William Blake’s influence, it is imperative that I read and research not only his body of work, but also the collection of pieces that drew directly from this work. The most logical step to accomplishing this is to address each of Blake’s works individually, and research each specifically, to find connections with contemporary outlets. As such, libraries are good place to begin not only the research on Blake but also on those pieces which were influenced by him. Searching databases like the Marvel Comics Online Universe would also be prudent for information gathering. Once I have a complete picture of his work and the work of those he influenced, it will be possible to move forward with a comprehensive review and analysis of his effect on works that use Videre Verba as a style.

According to Whitson, although the majority of research has been conducted on the original sources that Blake impacted, it is important to take into account the discoveries that others have made and factor their insights into my own theories. “I believe that the most motivating force for research on Blake’s influence can be drawn to the Nazi symbol in the background.

William Blake Everett’s *The Sub-Mariner* is one of a few sources that shares aspects in the same work (as Blake’s own art often did) in order to assess the degree of his work’s impact on those areas. Most of the research will center on graphic novels and comic books, which, being most similar to his own approach, are ideally suited for discussing William Blake.

In Alan Moore’s *From Hell*, the protagonist, Sir William Gull, travels through time and inspires William Blake’s The Ghost of a Flea painting.

A clear thematic connection can be drawn to the Nazi symbol in the background.

A portrait of William Blake. Blake was a Romantic poet, painter, and printmaker.