

William Blake is a point of pride for the English, and they're quick to remind you he was an artist as well as poet. I contend he was a man before his time, a comic book maker before comic books existed. The current exhibition of his drawings, prints, books and such at Tate Britain makes my point for me. **Pawn** attended Sunday along with artist friend J.



Blake was born in London in 1757, in Broad St, Soho, and stayed in that area throughout his life, passing away in 1827. While most American college students know Blake for his poetry, here his work as a print maker is at least as well known, and celebrated. Print making is how he made his living, for the most part, having been trained as an engraver. In 1788 he developed a new technique, Relief Etching, which allowed him to combine text and graphics (sound familiar?) on a single page.

Most of Blake's prints center around biblical themes and stories, and, as such, are somewhat a mystery to me, with my not-so-religious tendencies. I can still enjoy the imagery, of course. Religious stories dovetail with the overwrought nature of Blake's work. Musculature is always on display, to the point of absurdity at times. Take this example, where even the clutching child is ripped:



Keynes 42 (21) and 44 (3)

The exhibit is expansive, containing tonnes of Blake's work, including several complete volumes, many of which had previously been rent from their bindings, the better to be displayed as individual pieces. There's even some discussion of this practice, and rumination upon how the viewing experience is changed when these images are encountered separately, as opposed to turning page after page of them.

One later piece, in the final gallery, is displayed with each page laid out, and a magnifier lens available to place over to aid in the reading. One visitor took this not as a suggestion, but a commandment, and proceeded to go from page to page with the magnifier, reading aloud the text for all to hear. Quite odd, that.

Enough of my prattling, for that matter. Here's more snaps, cleaned up a bit. Then I'll leave you to it.







"Every thing is an attempt"  
"To be Human"

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"I sought Pleasure & found Pain"  
"Unutterable"





75  
Fiercely the Angels rose, & as they rose deep thunders roll'd  
Around their shores; indignantly burning with the fires of Love  
And Boston's Angel cried aloud as they flew thro' the dark  
night



He cried: Why troubles honesty, and like a murderer,  
Why seeks he refuge from the swords of his immortal saviour?  
Must the generous tremble & leave his joy, to the rage; to  
the pestilence! What mock him? who incens'd at this, what one? what rage  
To keep the generous from experience till the ungenerous  
In unrestrained performances of the courages of nature?  
Till pity is become a trifle, and generosity a sin?  
That men get rich by, & the sandy desert is join'd to the sea?  
What God is he, who wears robes of purple, & clothes him in a purple?  
What piping Angel lusts for tears, and sings himself with sighs?  
What crawling villain preaches abstinence & urges himself  
In fat of lards; no more I follow, no more obedience pay.





Thus apt the Angel came to us brought the terrible lightning  
 Of trumpet, blow a loud alarm across the Atlantic deep,  
 No trumpet's sound, no rattle of drums or of files,  
 Silent the Colours roused and raised the loud alarm.

On those vast steep hills Eastern America is Albion's shore,  
 Now horrid cut by the Atlantic sea, call'd Atlantic hills;  
 Because from their bright summits you may pale to the Yellow waters  
 An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperors,  
 Rears its immortal pyramids, built in the forest of God  
 By America the King of beauty for his stolen bride.

Here on their magic seats the thirteen Angels sat perched  
 For clouds from the Atlantic heave over the solana mid.







These are from Blake's Busby Berkeley phase ☐









As with almost all of the large museum shows this trip, *William Blake* was heavily attended, the crowds making it quite hard to enjoy the works in many cases. The show, at Tate Britain, runs through 2 February 2020.