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## Blake and Dürer

by EDWARD J. ROSE

*"If I were not Michelangelo,  
I should rather be Albrecht Dürer."*

BLAKE inherited a traditional definition of sculpture that perhaps does not come immediately to mind when the word is employed. Originally, as the *OED* records, "sculpture" is the "process or art of carving or engraving a hard material so as to produce designs or figures in relief, in intaglio, or in the round. . . ." Blake's habit of signing himself sculptor as well as inventor, author, or printer is in terms of this definition unremarkable. It would be a mistake, however, not to appreciate fully what the vocation of sculptor meant to him as an engraver and etcher, especially when his admiration for Michelangelo or Dürer and his method of relief etching are taken into account.<sup>1</sup> Blake saw himself carving and chiselling like the great sculptors of Italy and Antiquity, only in copper instead of stone.<sup>2</sup> The hammer of Los is not only that of the smithy but also that of the sculptor.

Blake's preference for Poussin, which accompanied his distaste for Rubens, reflects his inclination to admire sculpture-like figures, even in painting.<sup>3</sup> Of course, his praise of Poussin is prompted in part by his antipathy for the aesthetic judgments of Joshua Reynolds. Like Poussin, who with Claude Lorrain represents the Roman school of painting in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Dürer comes to represent in Blake's mind an anti-Reynolds point of view, not the least of which is the German's firm and determinate outline. As Blunt observes, Blake's "obsession with outline . . . led him to admire many classical artists, such as Poussin, with whom otherwise he can have had little in common." In reply to Reynolds' criticism of the principles on which Dürer's style is based and his assertion that he "would, probably, have been

1. See John W. Wright, "Blake's Relief-Engraving Method," *Blake Newsletter*, IX (Spring 1976), 94-114.

2. It is difficult to ascertain precisely when Blake first read Vasari, but by 1795 he was already familiar with the *Lives*. There is no evidence that he knew Leonardo's or Cennini's commentaries. Blake is devoted to Michelangelo, Raphael, and the late Gothic. See my essay, "The 'Gothicised Imagination' of 'Michelangelo Blake,'" in *Blake in his Time*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Donald Pearce (Indiana Univ. Press, 1978). It is closely related to this article.

3. See my article, "'A Most Outrageous Demon': Blake's Case Against Rubens," *Bucknell Review*, XVII (March 1969), 33-54; reprinted in *The Visionary Hand*, ed. Robert N. Essick (Los Angeles, 1973), pp. 311-336.

one of the first painters of his age," Blake exclaims "What does this mean 'Would have been' one of the first Painters of his Age Albert Durer Is! Not would have been!"<sup>4</sup> Siding with the Roman and Florentine schools and berating Rubens and the Venetians, Blake overlooks (perhaps intentionally) the extent of Venice's influence on Dürer's work. He also may have heard of Michelangelo's supposed opinion of Dürer, which would only have encouraged him to be unrestrained in his praise: "I esteem him so much," Michelangelo is reported to have said, "that, if I were not Michelangelo, I should rather be Albrecht Dürer. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Dürer's now famous watercolor landscape paintings are among the first in that medium, but by the seventeenth century in England watercolor is used mainly for miniature portraits ("limning") and for informal kinds of history painting. Although Blake is sometimes regarded as the modern artist who reconceived and reinvented the illuminated manuscript in an attempt to mass-produce it, his vivid and revolutionary watercolors are in a medium not highly regarded in his own time, hence his spirited defense of water and tempera as a medium to be preferred to oil (Michelangelo's own prejudice). We must also remember that Blake does not draw a sharp distinction between water as a medium and water combined with some kind of binder, which is why he speaks of watercolor, tempera, and fresco in one breath. Trained like Dürer as an engraver and etcher, Blake turns, as Dürer often did, to watercolor, but only after first developing his technique by using watercolors to color his prints. And his approach is governed in practice and theory, like Dürer's, by drawing. For Blake, as for Dürer, the design and the execution of that design depends upon outline.

Hagstrum writes of Blake's admiration for Raphael's purity of outline and says his "influence was a variant of Michelangelo's and Albrecht Dürer's."<sup>6</sup> The names could be shifted or interchanged and the accuracy of Hagstrum's observation would still be unerring. As a watercolorist and engraver-etcher, Blake is in some ways closer to Dürer than to Michelangelo or Raphael, although his admiration for the two Florentines is unbounded. This closeness to Dürer extends from their respective membership in the brotherhood of engravers to the limited surfaces available to them. Blake's "invention" of the *portable fresco* is his compromise with his circumstances. He knows he really needs a wall or a ceiling on which to paint. Furthermore, the physical climate in which he lives—not to speak of the spiritual—is not receptive to grand designs, especially in true fresco or even true tempera. Blake admires both the spontaneity and the mental preparation needed to execute in fresco. For

4. Annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, Discourse III, p. 71, in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed., David V. Erdman (New York, 1970), p. 638. See Anthony Blunt, "Blake's Pictorial Imagination," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, VI (1943), 209.

5. Quoted in Robert J. Clements, *Michelangelo's Theory of Art* (New York, 1961), p. 267. See my essay, "The 'Gothicised Imagination' of 'Michelangelo Blake.'" "

6. Jean H. Hagstrum, *William Blake: Poet and Painter* (Chicago, 1964), p. 41.

Blake execution is paramount: "He who Admires Rafael Must admire Rafaels Execution He who does not admire Rafaels Execution Cannot Admire Rafael." While he may not have responded fully to Dürer's diagrams and proportions, he is aware that an engraver and a fresco or tempera painter must know in advance what he is to do before he attacks his surface, especially with regard to color.<sup>8</sup>

Blake knows that a good and careful craftsman must make deliberate preparations. "Special emphasis is placed upon rules which govern fresco in contrast with oil painting. The best artistic creation is lost if the ground and the color [are] not applied according to rule." No successful artist is undisciplined, and Blake certainly observes "rules" at all stages of his work. Fresco painters must be better acquainted with their medium and their materials than oil painters. Doerner observes that although a fresco painter need not do "all the preliminary work himself, . . . the example of Michelangelo may here be a great incentive." Needless to say, Michelangelo's example meant much to Blake, which is why he is so harsh on the methods employed by Rubens and Titian, where apprentices often did much of the work. The fresco painter, "must know what counts." "Painting in fresco is a thrilling experience, and anyone who has tried it once will love this technique just for the difficulties. . . . It requires the *whole man*. Delacroix said that the necessity of having everything ready at once in fresco stimulates in the soul a feeling of excitement which is directly opposed to the indolence which oil painting engenders." Delacroix's experiences with fresco explain much of the doctrinal force of Blake's well-known hostility to oil as a medium even though he never had the opportunity to work directly on wet plaster. Besides identifying fresco with watercolor painting in general, Blake makes fresco a symbol of the spirited kind of painting described by Doerner and Delacroix. Fresco is done best by those artists who have learned to carve their forms or to draw their figures with a firm and determinate outline.

Because Blake was never on the Continent, he had little opportunity to obtain firsthand knowledge of much of the art he most admired or detested. The only chances he had to see the works of the great Continental masters, other than in prints, was in a few private collections to which he eventually gained access after 1800. We know from Gilchrist that in 1804 he saw the collection of Count Truchsess, but we must remember he was almost fifty years of age. And he was in his sixties when he visited the London home of the noted collector Aders. Therefore,

7. Annotations to *Reynolds*, Discourse VI, p. 167; Erdman, p. 646. See my essay, "'A Most Outrageous Demon': Blake's Case Against Rubens."

8. Blake gives specific instructions to Cumberland about preparing the ground for etching, see his letter to George Cumberland, 6 December 1795, in *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1966), pp. 790-791.

9. Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist*, trans. Eugen Neubaus, rev. edn. (New York, 1962), p. 266 (my italics). All quotations in this paragraph are from Doerner.

what we see in Blake's admiration or distaste for one painter or another is not primarily a question of influence but of sympathetic or unsympathetic recognition. Although Blake never stopped learning, his firsthand knowledge of the great painters of Europe came fairly late in his mature years, well after the formation of his own basic style. Blunt says in "Blake's Pictorial Imagination" that subsequent to 1804, the influence of the work of Dürer and the German and Flemish engravers in the collection of Count Truchsess is visible. He cites in particular the Nebuchadnezzar and Whore of Babylon pictures, but this influence, I believe, is not really profound. Blake is already too much Blake. It is important to keep in mind, also, that Blake's explicit references to Dürer come after 1800, so that even his sympathetic response to Dürer is only a feature of his post-Truchsessian period, which is further encouraged late in his life by a group of young artists with painterly concerns.

Hagstrum cites Binyon's opinion that the "Job engravings constitute the grandest work on copper since Dürer," and then says that Dürer "deserves much of the credit," since his "wonderfully clean line-incisions, . . . fully vindicated Blake's passionate support of line over tonal art."<sup>10</sup> Blake's devotion to line, like Dürer's, originates, it is certainly true, with surfaces like copper. To give one-dimensional shapes the quality of three-dimensional forms is to unite painting and sculpture, at least partially, in the engraved plate itself. The Job engravings, of course, belong to that post-Truchsessian period.

Max Doerner writes that "*Dürer* demanded of painting the most painstakingly definite drawing of every detail," which, of course, Blake sensed not only in Dürer but in Michelangelo and Raphael, even when he had no explicit clue other than Vasari. It is this particularizing and the sculptural quality that Blake sees in the work of Poussin. Dürer often works up outlines tinted with color, often in oil, but Doerner contends that "it is not thinkable that his finest work was merely oil painting." He is convinced that Dürer could not have used liquid oils for all the under- and overpainting he did because the result would have been nothing but a dark brown gallery tone—the "excrement" color that Blake sees in Rubens. Dürer's characteristic crispness could not have survived in such a medium. "It is simply not possible to achieve the fine quality of [Dürer's] brush lines in anything but a water medium. . . . No matter how skillful one may be, if one attempts the same thing in oil, the result will more often than not be merely a formless spot. . . . There is only one medium which permits the execution of such details in the Dürer manner, and that is tempera diluted with water. . . ."<sup>11</sup> Dürer's method, or what Blake could know of it, simply reinforces his own prejudices against oil and strengthens his Michelangesque opin-

10. Hagstrum, p. 38.

11. Doerner, p. 340. Vasari records that Michelangelo once said, "Oil painting is an art for ladies, for lazy and slack persons. . . ."

ions about drawing and outline. (According to Vasari, Dürer sent a self-portrait to Raphael. Its lights were translucent with opaque white and it was painted entirely in watercolor.) By trying to employ tempera but unfortunately with not enough knowledge of its chemistry, Blake tries to paint like Dürer so he can avoid the formless blots and blurs he sees in the works of other painters like Rubens and Rembrandt. It is possible that Blake might have known that Dürer underpainted in oil or resin-varnish, but it is certain that he knows or suspects that tempera and watercolor produce the draughtsman-like details in Dürer's work that he so admires.<sup>12</sup> He calls Poussin a "particularizer," but Dürer (an engraver), like Michelangelo (a sculptor), is even more obviously dedicated to the bounding line. What is more, Dürer and Michelangelo always insisted upon doing everything themselves: building scaffolds, grinding colors, quarrying marble, underpainting. Blake admires this kind of self-reliant individualism and personal dedication.

Samuel Palmer recalls for Gilchrist that, although Blake had minor reservations about certain details in his work, "No man more admired Albert Dürer." It was "hard to tell," Palmer writes, "whether he was more delighted with the general design, or with the exquisite finish and the depth of the chiselling. . . ." Of Dürer's woodcuts, Blake remarks, according to Palmer, that they "seemed to consist principally of outlines;—that they were 'everything and yet nothing.'"<sup>13</sup>

Many of Blake's contemporaries understand and recognize his admiration of and self-identification with Michelangelo, which dates from an earlier stage in Blake's career than their growing awareness (like Palmer's) that Blake also has a special feeling for Dürer. The Quaker poet Bernard Barton writes shortly after Blake's death to Linnell that "There is a dryness and hardness in Blake's manner of engraving . . . [and] his style is little calculated to take with admirers of modern engraving. It puts me in mind of some old prints I have seen, and seems to combine some what of old Albert Dürer with Bolswert."<sup>14</sup> Palmer recalls that Dürer's famous *Melancholia*, "memorable as probably having been seen by Milton, and used in his *Penseroso*," was "close by [Blake's] engraving table."<sup>15</sup>

Nobody seems to have called Blake by the name of Albert Dürer, but in apparent good humor Charles Heathercote Tatham did ask Linnell if he could "engage Michael Angelo *Blake* to meet" him.<sup>16</sup> Ozias Humphry had no doubt about the relation of the two artists. He says of Blake's *Last Judgment* that "The size of this drawing is but small not

12. For Blake's own experiments in underpainting, see Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, rev. edn. (London, 1945), pp. 366, 396.

13. Gilchrist, pp. 302, 311. Blake, according to Gilchrist, did complain about Dürer's draperies, which, he said, hid the naked human form and were too rigid and formal.

14. Quoted in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford, 1969), p. 397.

15. Gilchrist, p. 303.

16. Quoted in *Blake Records*, p. 288.

exceeding twenty Inches by fifteen or Sixteen (*I guess*) but then the grandeur of its conception, the Importance of its subject, and the sublimely multitudinous masses, & groups, which it exhibits. . . . In brief, It is one of the most interesting performances I ever saw; & is, in many respects superior to the last judgment of Michael Angelo and to give due credit & effect to it, would require a Tablet, not less than the Floor of Westminster Hall."<sup>17</sup> Like Dürer, Blake does not have a "Tablet" large enough to accommodate adequately the imaginative dimensions of his designs.

Michelangelo's piety, his Platonism (or neo-Platonism), his antipathy for oil, and the emphasis he repeatedly placed upon drawing, all of which Blake adopts, are strengthened by his knowledge of Dürer's works. In addition, the German artist's gothicism also encouraged Blake's predilection for the Gothic style. Of these influences or shared ideas, the most important is the emphasis that both Michelangelo and Dürer placed on drawing. Blake often repeats his own opinions on line or outline, and it would be possible to cite many passages in evidence; the most comprehensive, however, is this passage from his *Descriptive Catalogue*:

The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, [p. 64] and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling. Great inventors, in all ages, knew this: Protogenes and Apelles knew each other by this line. Rafael and Michael Angelo, and Albert Durer, are known by this and this alone. The want of this determinate and bounding form evidences the want of idea in the artist's mind, and the pretence of the plagiary in all its branches. How do we distinguish the oak from the beech, the horse from the ox, but by the bounding outline? How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements? What is it that builds a house and plants a garden, but the definite and determinate? What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty [p. 65] in the actions and intentions. Leave out this [l]ine and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to observe that Blake equates "form" with "outline." Such an equation tells us much about his pictorial Platonism, of which Michelangelo and Dürer are the primary sources, because it demonstrates how he associates the form and outline with the "idea in the artist's mind." Although they develop into great painters, Michelangelo and Dürer are initially sculptors, but sculptors in two senses: first, they are sculptors in the Platonic sense, that is, creators of mental forms in the mind; and, secondly, they are sculptors in marble and in copper or wood. They perceive the form in their minds and then find it in the material with which they are working. For Blake there is no "Existence Out of Mind or Thought," and, therefore, the corporeal has no "dwelling

17. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

18. *A Descriptive Catalogue*, number XV: Erdman, p. 540.

Place":<sup>19</sup> "And though [Michelangelo] would certainly have rejected—in contrast to the convictions of classical antiquity and modern classicism—a deviation of the artistic Idea from sensory experience, he did not think it necessary explicitly to assert, as did the Mannerist metaphysics of art, that it originates in some supraterrrestrial sphere."<sup>20</sup> Dürer himself is specific on this question: "For a good painter is inwardly full of figures, and if it were possible that he live forever, he would have from inner ideas, of which Plato writes, always something new to pour out in his works."<sup>21</sup>

Although Michelangelo admired Dürer's designs and his drawing, he does disparage the mathematical proportions in the *Proportionslehre*, at least what he knew of them. Of course, such a reaction is typical of Michelangelo who also has little good to say about Leonardo's theories. Despite the honor shown mathematics (not to be unexpected in Platonic influenced systems of thought) in the pictorial arts in the Renaissance, and despite Michelangelo's inclination to fix upon the *figura serpentinata*, which the Mannerists and Blake share, Michelangelo and his eighteenth-century English disciple distrust the ratiocinative. At least they seem unwilling to rely on it with the same confidence that Dürer does, at least in theory. Yet Los as well as Satan possesses a "Mathematic Power." And Dürer would be the first to acknowledge his "*inneren Ideen*," which take precedence over any kind of theoretical or mathematical formulations. It is Dürer, after all, who applies to man the attribute that Seneca assigned to God by saying that the painter is "*inwendig voller Figur*" (inwardly full of figures). Dürer's conception of the painter's imagination, which by the eighteenth century had become common, if not conventional, makes its appearance in *Jerusalem* in a highly figurative and mythic fashion:

All things acted on Earth are seen in the bright Sculptures of  
Los's Halls & every Age renews its powers from these Works  
. . . & every sorrow & distress is carved here  
Every Affinity of Parents Marriages & Friendships are here  
In all their various combinations wrought with wondrous Art<sup>22</sup>

Los is man's imagination, his mental life, and, therefore, in his halls are the mental forms after which all things are "carved": there are many sculptures (*voller Figur*) in the mind of a creative man. This theory of art not only appears in *Jerusalem* and *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, but also reflects Blake's everyday inward vision: "The other evening," said Blake, in his usual quiet way, 'taking a walk, I came to a meadow and, at the farther corner of it, I saw a fold of lambs. Coming nearer,

19. *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 94–95: Erdman, p. 555. See also *VLJ*, 69: Erdman, pp. 544–545.

20. Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, trans. J. J. S. Peake (Columbia, S.C., 1968), p. 121.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 123–124.

22. *Jerusalem*, 16: Erdman, p. 159.



the ground blushed with flowers; and the wattled cote and its woolly tenants were of an exquisite pastoral beauty. But I looked again, and it proved to be no living flock, but beautiful sculpture.' The lady, thinking this a capital holiday show for her children, eagerly interposed, 'I beg pardon, Mr. Blake, but *may* I ask *where* you saw this?' 'Here, madam,' answered Blake, touching his forehead."<sup>23</sup> It is to be noted that once again the forms are not only *mental* but also *sculptures*. Of Blake we could rightly ask, as Wölfflin does of Dürer, "if there is not a certain coolness in Dürer's whole relationship to the visible world."<sup>24</sup>

That Blake shares with Dürer a "certain coolness" to the visible world cannot be denied, but he also shares with the German artist an eye for detail and an imaginative vision. He also shares with him the desire to establish pure forms that would be free of the arbitrary and the indeterminate. Both artists aim for sculptural qualities in their engraving and their painting. By emphasizing outline, they make all other elements dependent on line.<sup>25</sup> Wölfflin says of Dürer, "light and colour are entirely subservient to sculpturally lucid form and do not lead an independent life. To force a strong awareness of sculptural qualities onto the spectator is only the first aim; the higher artistic purpose is to represent things entirely according to their true and essential nature. . . . He wanted to show man as he should be according to the designs of God."<sup>26</sup> This is, of course, the ultimate aim of Michelangelo. In fact, his success at creating idealized human forms is attacked not only by latter day critics but by those hostile to him during his lifetime. Often the adverse criticism is directed at the anatomical proportions of his figures. Raphael is said to have painted gentlemen, while Michaelangelo painted porters. Both Dürer and Blake have been criticized for the way in which they draw the human form. But sculptural forms outlined according to the idea in the artist's mind are not likely to satisfy the vegetable eye of those who do not measure all things by the ideas in the mind. Blake's desire to restore the art of antiquity by creating giant forms "according to their true and essential nature," as Wölfflin says of Dürer, is traceable to his admiration of Dürer and Michelangelo. The "determinate and bounding line" that distinguishes one face from another also "distinguishes honesty from knavery." The outlined and sculptured form is both an aesthetic and an "ethic vision."<sup>27</sup> In many ways Blake is closer to Dürer than Michelangelo because they are fellow

23. Gilchrist, p. 317.

24. Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Art of Albrecht Dürer*, trans. Alastair and Heide Grieve (London, 1971), p. 16. See also p. 285: "This Platonic idea of beauty had cast a spell over Dürer."

25. Blake identifies Los with outline. See my essay, "The Spirit of the Bounding Line: Blake's Los," *Criticism*, XIII (Winter 1971), 54-76.

26. Wölfflin, pp. 19-20, 27. Blake's letter to Dr. Trusler, 23 August 1799, especially the third paragraph, underscores this comment on Dürer: Erdman, pp. 676-677. In order to "represent things entirely according to their true and essential nature" and under the form of eternity, it is essential, Blake contends, not only to see with imagination but to see in detail. This is what rouses the faculties to act.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 16. See also in Wölfflin, p. 18 and 18n above.

engravers, that is, sculptors in copper rather than marble and painters without walls and ceilings ample enough to accommodate their grand forms and conceptions. It may be said of Blake as it has been said of Dürer, "that copper engraving was the technique closest to his heart"<sup>28</sup> and that in which he is most fully his own man. There is no record, however, of Blake having complained, like Dürer, of the "tiresomeness" of painting.<sup>29</sup>

Blake and Dürer are especially given to self-quotation. Whereas some artists will use early drawings or designs in their later work that they have completely re-styled, Dürer and Blake will engrave after or paint from drawings (even engrave after paintings), ten or fifteen years later, without seriously altering the original design. Dürer will use a drawing from 1498 for an engraving in 1513 with little or no alteration, while Blake uses the same designs repeatedly in different contexts and times, often years after first conceiving them.<sup>30</sup> Any scholar who has examined the *Vala-Four Zoas* manuscript will wonder if the *Night Thoughts* illustrations left over from that project in the form of proof-sheets have any bearing on the *Vala* text, which was written out on them. Blake's habit of transposing his designs encourages such speculations. Of course, neither Dürer nor Blake would have thought there was anything unsuitable in re-using an already proven design if it could be inserted without violence in a work for which it was not originally intended. A trained engraver or woodcutter who is producing designs to be employed as book illustrations and who must meet the heavy demands placed upon him as an artisan, or even a shopkeeper, is likely to be frugal with his portfolio, especially if he is confronted with deadlines. Of course, woodcutting and engraving evolve in order to meet the need for duplication, hence Blake's version of the illuminated book.

Both Panofsky and Wölfflin remark on the late Gothic characteristics of Dürer's work.<sup>31</sup> Wölfflin writes that "The things he liked in nature were essentially those on which the whole of contemporary late Gothic art was based. He liked gnarled branches, stags' antlers, the strongly serrated leaves of vines and hops, curling tendrils, intertwined roots, detailed grape clusters and umbels. Dürer tried to show the illusion of free movement rather than a fixed geometrical pattern, he wanted a painterly effect of tangled, inexhaustible, unlimited movement rather than a clearly arranged display."<sup>32</sup> Wölfflin could easily be describing

28. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

29. Michelangelo, however, like Dürer, complained about painting.

30. *Albion Rose*, the so-called "Glad Day" painting, is a case in point. Ordinarily Blake first prepared a drawing, which he sometimes colored before engraving and sometimes after engraving. So far as re-used engraved designs are concerned, see, for example, "London" in *Songs of Experience* and plate 84 of *Jerusalem*, plate 4 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the color print "The Good and Evil Angels Struggling for Possession of a Child." See also, Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 4th edn. (Princeton, 1955), pp. 13-14.

31. Panofsky, *Dürer*, pp. 12, 59, and passim; Wölfflin, pp. 228-229. See also, Panofsky, "Albrecht Dürer and Classical Antiquity," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York, 1955), p. 282.

32. Wölfflin, p. 228.

the ornamentation on any of countless pages in the illuminated books, the Job pictures, the Milton illustrations, the *Night Thoughts* watercolors. Blake's devotion to the Gothic, particularly the late Gothic, is well-known and was stimulated both by his study of Dürer and the late work of Michelangelo. His pages are covered by coiling vines and tendrils, grape clusters, twisted branches, serrated leaves, bent roots, and insect and animal forms. A Blake margin or interlinear space is Gothic in character and certainly Düreresque.

Although both Dürer and Blake are stylistically constant throughout their careers, they do develop as pictorial artists in a Michelangesque way. It is easy to observe the development in Dürer by comparing the early and late woodcuts he did for the Book of Revelation. It is easy to observe a similar kind of development in Blake through his Milton, Job, and Dante designs. In fact, in terms of a growing freedom, simple subtlety, and boldness, Dürer's Apocalypse designs and Blake's designs for the Book of Job may be compared. Both series demonstrate the kind of development that can be observed in Michelangelo's frescoes for the Sistine Chapel.<sup>33</sup> In Blake's work, in fact, it is possible to observe a growth in scale throughout his career. By comparing his designs for Young's *Night Thoughts* with those he made for the Book of Job, it is possible to see how much his ability to control the composition and execute the design had improved over the intervening thirty years.

Like Michelangelo, Dürer and Blake are drawn repeatedly to the Bible for inspiration and subject. Both artists choose to illustrate the Book of Revelation, and although Blake does not do so in a formal series, he makes enough designs for that Book for us to observe how sweeping and effective his visions of John's vision are. Each artist chooses to illustrate the Woman clothed with the Sun, Michael battling the Dragon, the Babylonian Whore, and the Beast.<sup>34</sup> As admirable as Dürer's designs are (and they are flawlessly executed), we can observe by looking at Blake's magnificent watercolors that not only have three centuries passed but the English artist does not depend on the kind of sources used by the German artist.<sup>35</sup> Blake's freedom and inventiveness are partly the effect of his age and partly the result of his own spirit. It is a historical irony—the result again of three hundred years of development in reproductive techniques—that Dürer should have started as a woodcutter who then became an engraver on copper, whereas Blake started as an engraver who had the opportunity only near the end of his life to experiment with woodcuts. In some ways, interestingly enough, Blake's woodcuts for Virgil's *Eclogues* are every bit as revolutionary in the history of English woodcutting as Dürer's were at the end of the fifteenth

33. See Panofsky, *Dürer*, p. 58, and "The 'Gothicised Imagination' of 'Michelangelo Blake.'" "

34. Blake's "Death on the Pale Horse" is characteristic of his own work, but bears comparison in some respects with the horsemen in Dürer's series. The stillness that coexists with the movement in the designs of each artist is not unlike.

35. See Panofsky, *Dürer*, p. 53, for the tradition out of which Dürer's designs emerged.

century. Blake's free-wheeling approach to the wood (no longer the common material for reproduction) is built on years of experience with copper. Like Dürer, Blake is in his element when working on copper, but his designs and his execution are impressive no matter what the surface or the medium.

Although Blake might well have been taken aback by Lomazzo's having dubbed Dürer the "grand Druid" or by the sometimes discernible influence of the Venetians on Dürer's work, he does share with him his faith, his vocation as a book illustrator, his training as an engraver, his Platonism, and his romantic Classicism with its love of the Antique. No artist is more representative of the "particularizer" than Dürer. And, after all, in terms of technique there is a great similarity between cutting on and printing with wood and relief-etching on copper, enhanced, as was Blake's practice, by additional hand cutting. Neither artist had Michelangelo's marble or the vast surfaces of the Sistine Chapel, but both painted or cut their copper as if they were working in fresco or with marble.

Erasmus called Dürer the Apelles of "black lines." Blake would certainly have agreed: "Till we get rid of Titian and Correggio, Rubens and Rembrandt, We never shall equal Rafael and Albert Durer, Michael Angelo and Julio Romano." He makes Dürer a member of his quaternity of master artists. And even when he reduces this quaternity to a trinity or when he substitutes the ancient artists or Apelles for Romano, he will include Dürer. But as I have tried to demonstrate, Blake's relation to Dürer is essentially not a question of influence but, instead, of the affinity of creative minds. Blake felt that Dürer, a fellow engraver, shared his Michelangesque judgments and his "Gothicised Imagination." The actual resemblances between the works of Blake and Dürer are slight when compared to the obvious similarities between Blake and Michelangelo. Blake's relation to Dürer is essentially doctrinal and theoretical.

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