

Read the article and try to write in your own words what its purpose is. What point is the journalist trying to make? Why did he write this article? What important piece of information does it reveal? How is Blake depicted in this article? What are the qualities the journalist emphasises of this British artist? (list them) What does the journalist "denounce"? A glossary of presumably unknown words is at the bottom of the article.

Blake's heaven

Only one British artist would make it on to a list of the world's all-time greatest



The Louvre has bought a number of British paintings including a watercolour by William Blake.

On the cover of my guidebook to St Petersburg's Hermitage is a painting of a woman in blue silk and white powder, hair flowing - a portrait by Thomas Gainsborough that hangs in the museum. This choice is flattering, until you notice that all the different language guides on the bookstand have nationally appropriate paintings. It's a naive bit of politeness. Not even we British go to the Hermitage to see Gainsborough.

British art, historically, has its charms. In addition to Gainsborough's perfumed rococo world, we have Constable and Turner. All three, if you have grown up with the swagging, blustering variability of British weather, are acute barometers of the national soul. But do their works make it into the world's top 10, or even top 100? Along with the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the Birth of Venus and the rest of the indispensables, would there be room for Hogarth's March to Finchley, or even Constable's Leaping Horse? Of course not. It is certain that these local masterpieces are precisely that, local.

There is one exception, one British artist who would make it on to the list - probably represented by his portrayal of Newton on the sea bed with his dividers or, perhaps, Urizen using those same compasses to "fix the whole into another world better suited to obey His Will".

William Blake is far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced. I feel both elated and embarrassed to say that, because in recent years the critical reputation of the poet, printmaker and

radical prophet of the French revolutionary era has been slipping, to say the least. Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell are never likely to be shifted from their place near the heart of English literature. **But Blake thought of himself as a visual artist; he illuminated his self-published writings, illustrated Dante and Chaucer, and painted singular oils** such as The Ghost of a Flea.

He has become one of those monuments whom it is considered timely to knock off their pedestal. In the 1990s he was given short shrift in Andrew Graham-Dixon's influential television history of British art, and when Tate Britain celebrated the millennium with a Blake show the vogue for belittling the Lambeth visionary went mainstream. I sat in front of the Late Review with my jaw hanging down at the spectacle of supposedly cultured people sneering at his draughtsmanship.

The latest belittling comes from academic research just announced that exposes him as a fumbling craftsman who (shock) didn't really create his prints in a starburst of insight but laboured patiently. The biggest insult in Blake's eyes, though, must be that Tate is unlikely to buy his recently rediscovered watercolours for Blair's Grave (no election reference intended) because it is keen to purchase Sir Joshua Reynolds' Portrait of Omai. Blake said Reynolds was "hired to Depress Art". Yet now apparently he is to lose out to the Georgian portraitist.

Tate Britain apparently thinks Reynolds a more urgent acquisition than Blake. But if the national museum of British art doesn't champion excellence in the field, who will? And Blake is as excellent as it gets.

I came back to Blake through Gainsborough, because Blake made me see the limitations of the portraits and landscapes I find so seductive. **What is it that British art lacks? The extremes of existence, the contrary states of the human soul - good and evil. British art tends to be socially and topographically acute, but the greatest painters have stood on more metaphysical ground. They have speculated on life and death, angels and devils. Just like Blake.**

Blake was perplexed by the things that should perplex people - moral absolutes, the limits of perception, the tragic duplicities by which we live. All this is expressed in his Songs of Innocence and Experience; who cannot recognise the corruption of inequality in his lines, "Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody Poor"?

There I go - quoting the poetry. **You can't experience Blake's art in isolation from his language, and that is the real reason for his current devaluation.** Britain has always been a literary culture but very recently we've fallen in love with visual art. Now we look to our past for great art - finding modern expression in a Constable mud patch.

We're kidding ourselves. British art has been minor compared to Shakespeare and Dickens. The world needs these writers but not our artists. **Blake** is the exception because he **unifies the verbal and the visual and, uniquely, ensures that some of the central poetry in the language exists in pictures as well as words.** The export order on the Blake watercolours expires at the end of May. There's still time to forget about Omai and buy great art for great art's sake.

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2005/apr/25/williamblake>

Glossary:

To swag: to sway unsteadily

To bluster: if the wind blusters, it blows violently

Dividers: an instrument used for measuring or marking lines or angles, consisting of two pointed pieces of metal joined together at the top

Elated: extremely happy and excited

To slip: to fall, slide

To get/be given short shrift if you or your idea, suggestion etc is given short shrift, you are told immediately that you are wrong and are not given any attention or sympathy:

To sneer at: to smile or speak in a very unkind way that shows you have no respect for someone or something:

Draughtsmanship: the skill of drawing or the ability to draw well

to fumble: To proceed awkwardly and uncertainly

craftsman: artigiano

Read the article and spot what extra information you get to know about Blake that the previous article did not mention. What are the links between Blake and Wordsworth? And Blake and Milton? Why do you think Blake was fascinated by the great poet of *Paradise Lost*? A glossary of presumably unknown words is at the bottom of the article.

Blake's vision on show



Long is the way ... Can Hollywood really manage to stay faithful to Milton's *Paradise Lost*? Photo: PA / The Wordsworth Trust and the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

Twelve paintings displaying the poet William Blake's highly personal view of God, the flesh and the devil will be seen in Britain today for the first time for nearly a century.

The early 19th-century artist and visionary was glad to get £10 for one of them, the price of a month's food for his family. Each canvas is now worth millions.

The paintings, which go on show at the Wordsworth museum in Grasmere in the Lake District, are among the 30 illustrations Blake did for John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, which struck a deep ambiguous chord with him.

They are being exhibited in Grasmere because of the epic's influence on English Romanticism and the Wordsworth sonnet that opens "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour".

None of the works has been seen in Britain since 1914. They were mostly sold outside the UK at the turn of the 19th century.

Gradually they were brought together at the Huntington gallery, California, under the legacy of a railway magnate, which until recently had a ban on lending its artefacts.

Blake's vision was heretical: humans were close to being holy innocents and were anatomically perfect; Satan was near to being a true god. The loan includes two of his best-known illustrations to Paradise Lost, Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve, in which a devil with the head of the Greek god Apollo looks down from on high while caressing the serpent; and The Rout of the Rebel Angels, a canvas seething with force.

Also in the Grasmere exhibition are The Temptation and Fall of Eve, Michael Foretells the Crucifixion, Raphael Warns Adam and Eve, and Satan, Sin and Death - Satan Comes to the Gates of Hell.

Blake wrote his own version of Paradise Lost, titled Milton, and the exhibition commemorates the 200th anniversary of the writing of this book and of the poem he included in the preface.

He called it And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time - although it is better known since being set to music as Jerusalem.

After Blake's death in 1827, Wordsworth wrote: "There was no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott."

Arguably, the legacy of Blake's ideas is now as great as the influence of Wordsworth's nature poems. The exhibition is being opened by Philip Pullman, whose bestselling trilogy, His Dark Materials, owes much to Blake and Milton.

The exhibition, which runs until October 31, includes works by Doré, Fuseli, Turner, Hogarth and other artists influenced by the epic.

http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/jul/06/artsandhumanities.arts#article_continue

Glossary

magnate: a rich and powerful person in industry or business [= tycoon]

to endear: to make someone popular and liked

endearment: actions or words that express your love for someone

rout: a complete defeat in a battle, competition, or election

to seethe: to feel an emotion, especially anger, so strongly that you are almost shaking [= fume]

Cause For Celebration:

The Location of William Blake's Grave discovered!



William Blake's last resting place is at Bunhill Fields Burial Ground, 38 City Road, London EC1Y 2BG.

The exact spot of William Blake's grave was recently re-discovered by Luis and Carol Garrido.

Since 1965, the exact location of William Blake's grave had been lost and forgotten, while gravestones were taken away to create a new lawn. [Nowadays, William Blake's grave is commemorated by a stone that reads 'nearby lie the remains of William Blake and his wife Catherine Sophia'](#). This memorial stone is situated approximately 20 metres away from William Blake's grave. The actual spot of Blake's grave is not marked.

When the couple first visited Bunhill Fields, in London, they simply intended to pay their respects. When they found that the actual location of Blake's grave was not known, they set out on a journey of investigation. The discovery was the result of a year's research, and has been acknowledged by the City of London, the Blake Society, and leading Blake scholars.

[The exact location of William Blake's grave is currently unmarked. It is situated on the edge of a large amenity lawn within Bunhill Fields Burial Ground.](#)

The Friends of William Blake was formed to petition for an appropriate monument at the exact location of Blake's grave.

<http://www.friendsofblake.org/home.htm>

If you are interested in Blake, the following websites may be of interest to you!

Nice video

http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/william_blake.shtml

British library

Class: 5H

Liceo Scientifico "M. Grigoletti", 2009-2010

Teacher: Ms. C. Ziraldo

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html>

Tate: teacher's materials on Blake

<http://www.tate.org.uk/learning/worksinfocus/blake/>

Library of Congress

<http://www.blakearchive.org/blake/>

<http://www.blakearchive.org/blake/>

Image Text

http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v3_2/

National Gallery of Victoria

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/blake/>