

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.





"Everything is an attempt!"
"To be Human."



"I sought Pleasure & found Pain"
"Unutterable"



Fiery the Angels rose, & as they rose deep thunder 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 furies of his immortal nature?
Must the generous tremble & leave his prey to the rale: to
the pestilence! What mock him? who incarnated this, what love? what rage?
To keep the generous from experience till the ungenerous
Are unrestrained performers of the energies of nature?
Till pity is become a trifle, and generosity a science?
That men get rich by, & the sinner's heart is join'd to the sinner?
What God is he, who's laws of peace, & clothes him in a serpent?
What piping Angel lusts for tears, and fairs himself with sighs?
What crawling villain preaches abstinence & wages himself
In fat of launds? no more I follow, no more obedience pay.



Thus apt the Angel rose to intercept the terrible lightning
 Of trumpet, blow a loud alarm across the Atlantic deep,
 No trumpet's sound, no note of trumpet or of horn,
 Silent the Colours rouse and refuse the loud alarm.

On those vast dark hills, Eastern America's Atlantic shore,
 Now harried out by the Atlantic sea, call'd Atlantean hills;
 Because from their bright summits you may gaze to the Yellow waters
 An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperors,
 Rears its immortal pyramids, built in the forest of God
 O'er America the king of beauty for his stolen bride.

Here on their magic seats the thirteen Angels sat purg'd
 For clouds from the Atlantic hover o'er the solemn road.





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.