The Context of Blake’s “Public Address”: Cromek and The Chalcographic Society

DENNIS M. READ

Of the enemies Blake numbered during his lifetime, he hated none more than the engraver, editor, and fine arts entrepreneur Robert Hartley Cromek (1770-1812). In his Notebook Blake renames Cromek “Bob Screwwash” and charges that he is “A Petty sneaking Knavo” who loves “the Art to Cheat.” Blake’s intense dislike of Cromek and his characterizing him as a consummate villain are predicated on two well-known projects which Blake believed Cromek advanced at his expense: an edition of The Grave with twelve illustrations designed by Blake and engraved by Louis Schiavonetti, published in 1808, and a full-size engraving by Schiavonetti of Thomas Stothard’s painting, The Procession of Chaucer’s Pilgrims to Canterbury, for which Cromek sold subscriptions from 1807 on, and which competed with Blake’s own painting and engraving of the same subject. However, a third project engineered largely by Cromek also moved Blake to righteous anger: a highly ambitious scheme to advance the art of engraving in England by the Chalcographic Society in 1810. Cromek, the Secretary of the Chalcographic Society, was a moving force behind this venture, and Blake regarded it as one more shady enterprise undertaken by Cromek simply to line his own pockets. Because the existence of the Chalcographic Society has never before been verified, nor Cromek’s participation in it and the nature of its undertakings known, scholars have neglected this final basis for the intractable differences between Blake and Cromek.

Blake’s most sustained argument against this project is advanced in his Notebook draft titled “Public Address” by modern editors. Nominally conceived as an advertisement for his proposed Canterbury Pilgrims engraving, Blake’s “Public Address” in fact is much more concerned with
The author of this paragraph is not given, but it seems most likely that the information in it, if not the paragraph itself, comes from Cromek, the Secretary of the Chalographic Society. Certainly the toast to Stothard's Canterbury Pilgrims shows that Cromek's present interests were being advanced at the dinner; perhaps Cromek himself was the proposer of the toast.

Shortly thereafter Cromek apparently submitted a draft of the Introduction to the Prospectus for the regeneration of English engraving to a leading patron of the fine arts, Thomas Hope. While this draft does not survive, Hope's encouraging response to it does. In a letter dated March 13, 1810, Hope wrote to Cromek:

Your plan seems to me excellent, but as its success must depend on the temper of the times, I would ask whether it does not engage in a work of too great an extent?

From frequent experience of the length of time to which works of that magnitude are protracted, and of the very different degrees of merit in the execution of the different parts, people have got a little tired of what they call long winded undertakings.

As the subjects of the plates seem not yet determined upon, or to be such as to require a definite number of plates,—might not a smaller one answer better to begin with?

Would it not be well to exemplify the abstract statement of the preeminence which the French School of engraving is likely to obtain, for want of encouragement in this country, by mentioning some very eminent French performance in the line manner, such, for instance, as the print of the death of Socrates, from David's picture, the like of which could not, under existing circumstances, be undertaken in England, with any prospect of advantage to the artist?

Should anything strike you which I might further explain, I should be most happy to do so any morning you and Mr. Hunt would do me the honor to fix for the purpose.

I must add, I think nothing can be more forcible than the arguments, or more elegant than the language of the Introduction; and I flatter myself I need not add that, should the plan take effect, I beg to be included among the Shareholders.

Hope's letter establishes the central position Cromek occupies in the project (which apparently still lacked its organizational name of The Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving), as well as the assistance of one of the Hunt brothers, probably Robert Hunt. Cromek's alliance with Robert Hunt, the author of the unsympathetic review of Blake's Grave, may seem perplexing at first. But in that review Hunt criticizes only Blake's designs, while praising "the large, elegant type, superfine paper, and masterly execution of the twelve highly finished Etchings by Schiavonetti" and "the faithful descriptions and manly poetry of Robert Blair." Also by the time Cromek published The Grave in mid-1808, he was assured of its financial success (having sold
nearly seven hundred Subscribers’ Copies of it) and had moved on to two other projects, his edition of Reliques of Burns (published in December 1808), and Schiavonetti’s proposed engraving of Stothard’s Canterbury Pilgrims painting.11 Perhaps more instructive than these mitigating explanations, however, is the observation that in practically all his dealings with others Cromack was the outsider who had to curry favor with those who could most help him, and that circumstance sometimes required his overlooking personal slights or even insults. Cromack needed the help of Robert and Leigh Hunt for this project, and he needed the pages of The Examiner for promoting it.

Hope’s letter also specifies the two major problems which led in time to the ultimate failure of the project: it was too ambitious and too “long-winded.” Cromack did not heed of Hope’s warning, however, and he, other members of the Chalcographic Society, and the Hunts continued to gather the support and participation of other leading connoisseurs and patrons for the project. Subsequent numbers of The Examiner report this growing list. The April 1, 1810 Examiner announces that “The excellent plan proposed by the Chalcographic Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving, has received the high sanction of his Highness the Duke of Gloucester,” as well as the support of Sir J. Leycester and Mr. T. Hope (p. 208). The May 13, 1810 Examiner announces that the “Committee of Patrons of the Chalcographic Plan for an enlarged promotion of the Art of Engraving in England has been selected,” with the Duke of Gloucester its President and the Marquis of Stafford, Sir J. F. Leycester, Mr. Thomas Hope, Mr. Anderdon, Mr. Whitbread, and Mr. William Smith its members (p. 304). And the May 27, 1810 Examiner announces that the Earl of Dartmouth and Sir Abraham Hume have been added to the Committee of Management of the Chalcographic Society plan (p. 333).

The names contained in these announcements are those of the most important connoisseurs and patrons of art of the time. William Frederick, second Duke of Gloucester (1776-1834), was the nephew of George III. Although he was best known as a career military officer, he also served as the Trustee to the British Museum nominated by the Crown; less than a year after the announcement of his association with the Chalcographic Society plan, on March 26, 1811, he was elected Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. Sir John Fleming Leycester (Leicester in DNB) (1762-1827) had worked vigorously to promote the notion of an English school of painting and sculpture. During 1805 and 1806 he had helped Sir Thomas Bernard establish the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom. A Descriptive Catalogue of his art collection written by William Carey was published in 1810. George Granville Leveson-Gower, the second Marquis of Stafford (1758-1833), was a man of immense wealth. Born into much of it, in 1803 he inherited the substantial estate of the late Duke of Bridgewater, including one of the most impressive collections of art in England. The Marquis of Stafford was also one of the first private collectors who admitted the public to view his art collection in his home. Samuel Whitbread (1758-1815), heir to the Whitbread brewery, was a politician with a strong interest in the arts. At this time he was much occupied with replacing the Drury Lane Theatre, which had been destroyed by fire on February 24, 1809. William Smith (1756-1835), also a politician, was a consistent supporter of the fine arts and had been a patron of the painter John Opie. George Legge, the third Earl of Dartmouth (1755-November 10, 1810), had been an official trustee of the British Museum since 1802. Sir Abraham Hume (1749-1838) was well known for his patronage of the arts and was a director of the British Institution. The association of these prominent connoisseurs with the Chalcographic Society plan indicates how ambitious an undertaking it was, much more ambitious than anything Cromack had been involved with before.

The outlines of the plan were made known in the May 20, 1810 Examiner. According to this announcement, one hundred and seventy shares were to be sold for one hundred guineas each. For the purchase of a share each patron would receive twenty different engravings of famous British paintings, sixteen of historical subjects and four of landscapes. The titles of the paintings are not given; probably the specific paintings had not yet been selected. The engravings would be “the size of the Death of Wolfe”; ten of them would be done “in the line manner,” six “in the dotted style,” and four “in mezzotinto.” The proceeds from the shares would be used to establish a Museum, a School of Engraving, and a Fund for Decayed Artists. This entire undertaking is the result of the efforts of the Chalcographic Society, “who, in defiance of the sneers of the weak and the opposition of the wily, and actuated by an honest wish to benefit their brethren as well as themselves, have thus brought their scheme successfully before the public” (p. 315).

In May or June 1810 the scheme was ostensibly passed from the Chalcographic Society to the ad hoc organization, the Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving, comprised of all the eminent men Cromack and his colleagues had enlisted. The immediate reason for this move is plain: if it seemed as though the scheme were directed by the Duke of Gloucester and his Committee of Managers, the part the Chalcographic Society played in it would be less evident and the basically self-serving
nature of the scheme would be less conspicuous. This pose of general benevolence is clearly expressed in the proof of an advertisement Cromek sent to James Montgomery on August 9, 1810, with instructions to print it twice in his weekly newspaper, the Sheffield Iris:

**SOCIETY FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE ART OF ENGRAVING**

At a meeting held in the Clarendon Hotel, on Wednesday, May 16th, 1810, for the purpose of ascertaining in what manner encouragement can be most judiciously and effectually extended to the Art of Engraving in this Country,—to render that Art to the rank which it ought to hold,—to the protection of living artists,—and to the production of future excellence in the same line—

His Royal Highness the Duke of GLOUCESTER in the Chair:

Resolved, that 17,000 guineas be raised in Shares of 100 guineas each; 25 guineas to be paid on subscribing, and the remainder in half-yearly installments of 25 guineas each. The whole capital subscribed shall be invested in the Public Funds, in the names of Trustees appointed by the Committee of Shareholders. This sum will enable the Engravers to execute, with their utmost powers, 20 plates, the size of the larger works of Strange and Woollett, making sixteen Historical and four Landscape Subjects, from the choicest Works of the best British and Ancient Masters.

That each Shareholder shall receive Proof Impressions of the Plates, with Etching Proofs of the same; the remainder to be for Public Sale.

That out of the surplus arising from the sale, an Establishment be formed, to which every Engraver may send his Works for Exhibition, &c. to which is to be added a Museum and School of Engraving.

That subscriptions be lodged at Messrs. Down, Thornton, and Cort, Bartholomew-lane; Messrs. Drummond and Co., Charing-cross; Messrs. Hammersley and Co. Pall-mall, Bankers, in the name of

His Royal Highness the Duke of GLOUCESTER,
The Marquis of Stafford
The Marquis of Douglas and Clysdale
Earl of Dartmouth
Sir John Fleming Leycester, Bart.
Sir Mark Sykes, Bart.
(The Committee of Managers appointed for conducting the business.)

Prospectuses of the Society’s Plan may be had at [blank space]; “Miss Gales, booksellers, Sheffield” written in; and of the Secretary to the Chalographic Society,

R.H. Cromek, 64, Newman-street, London

The new names on the Committee of Managers rank in importance with the others. Alexander Hamilton Douglas, the Marquis of Douglas and Clydesdale and later tenth Duke of Hamilton and seventh Duke of Brandon (1767-1852), was a trustee of the British Museum and Vice-President of the Royal Institution for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Scotland. On April 26, 1810, he had married the second daughter of William Beckford, later inheriting Beckford’s Fonthill Abbey, which was filled with valuable art-works (including several of Blake’s illuminated books and his illustrations to the poems of Gray). The sale of the collection of the Duke of Hamilton in 1882 brought an “unprecedented” sum, according to the Times of London. Sir Mark Sykes (1771-1823), an ardent book-collector, “possessed one of the finest private libraries in England,” according to DNB. Eventually it became a part of the British Museum Library. He also owned a complete collection of the engravings of Francesco Bartolozzi, for which he paid nearly five thousand pounds. Sir Thomas Bernard (1750-1818), a philanthropist, was the one person most responsible for the founding of the British Institution in 1805. The Committee of Managers thus consisted of twelve men having wealth, high station, impressive collections of art, and memberships in other organizations for the promotion of art in England.

Six of these twelve men had also helped to establish the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom in 1805: Sir Thomas Bernard, Sir Abraham Hume, William Smith, Thomas Hope, the Earl of Dartmouth, and the Marquis of Stafford. Because of some obvious similarities, the plan of the Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving seems to be modeled on that of the British Institution, which was founded “to open a public exhibition for the sale of the productions of British artists, to excite the emulation and exertion of younger artists by premiums, and to endeavour to form a public gallery of the works of British artists, with a few select specimens of each of the great schools.”20 The annual spring exhibitions at the British Institution were begun in 1806, and the group of connoisseurs supporting the British Institution contributed generous sums to the premiums. During these first five years of its existence, the British Institution had generated much public attention and its exhibitions had been well attended. No doubt Cromek’s group was hoping that the success of the British Institution would help assure their own.

The engravers who stood the best chance of benefiting from this scheme were the members of the Chalographic Society themselves. They are listed in the last paragraph of “Biographical Memoirs of the Late Lewis Schiavonetti,” written by Cromek and published in *Gentlemen’s Maga-
Cromeck, whose engraving production consisted chiefly of magazine illustrations designed by Stothard during the 1790's and early 1800's, this is a distinguished group of engravers. John Scott (1774-1827) is called "the ablest of animal engravers" in DNB; William Bromley (1769-1842) engraved many of G. J. Corbould's drawings of the Elgin Marbles for the trustees of the British Museum; Edward Scriven (1775-1841), according to DNB, "worked with much taste and skill and extreme industry" and "was a man of great active benevolence among the members of his own profession" who helped establish the Artists' Annuity Fund in 1810; William Skelton (1763-1848) was a student of Blake's master, James Basire, and was best known for his engraving of portraits, especially those by Beechey; William Bond specialized in portrait engraving and is listed in the Royal Kalendar of 1805 as an Auditor of the Society of Engravers; Samuel Middiman (1750-1831) was a reputable landscape engraver and believed to have been a student of Woollett; Thomas Cheesman (1760-1835) is called "one of the best pupils of Francesco Bartolozzi" by DNB; George Clint (1770-1854) was a portrait painter and engraver who later was elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1821; and James Ward (1769-1859), perhaps the most famous of the group, had been named painter and mezzotint engraver to the Prince of Wales in 1794 and elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1807. During his career he exhibited almost four hundred works at the Royal Academy and the British Institution. Counting the recently deceased Schiavonetti, the number of Chalcographic Society members is twelve, quite a select group out of the numerous engravers living in London at the time.

Cromeck's name in this group of accomplished and well known engravers seems inappropriate. In fact he had finished no engraving since 1807, the year the Chalcographic Society was founded, and John Pye later told Cromeck's son that "Your father never engraved if he could get anyone to work for him: he did not like it." Several ties between Cromeck and other Chalcographic Society members, however, can be ascertained. Five of them (Scott, Bromley, Scriven, Cheesman, and Ward) had subscribed to The Grave, published by Cromeck in 1808. In a letter postmarked August 7, 1809, Cromeck directs his sister to deliver a drawing to Middiman, who is to engrave it for fifteen guineas. Later in 1810 Cromeck engaged Bromley to complete Schiavonetti's etching of Stothard's Canterbury Pilgrims, announcing the arrangement in the September 2, 1810 Examiner (p. 554). As the Secretary of the Chalcographic Society, Cromeck combined zeal with determination to advance a scheme which would generously support Chalcographic society members. Cromeck's skill was in promoting the art of engraving, not in practicing it.

In 1810, English engraving was badly in need of promotion. Through a combination of little, if any, English patronage and an embargoes European market (a result of Napoleonic wars), the sale of single-plate engravings had plummeted. Engravers in England were left only with book-illustrating, a line which could support only a few of them and did little to improve the status of engraving as an art. This situation contrasted markedly with the flourishing engraving trade only several decades earlier. The Chalcographic Society scheme, however, could not directly benefit all English engravers, since it called for the execution of only twenty engravings. The several engravers executing them certainly would profit handsomely, but the most all other engravers would derive from the plan would be a renewed single-plate market and the more widely received opinion of engraving as an art. Perhaps in time other engravers would also benefit from the proposed exhibition gallery and museum to be established with the surplus of the seventeen thousand guineas, but that prospect hardly answered their immediate needs. Blake, who was excluded from this coterie, interpreted the scheme as a slick attempt to shake one hundred guineas from one hundred and seventy connoisseurs and amateurs (Blake sarcastically renamed them "The Cunning Sure & the Aim at yours" [E502] to express this exploitation disguised as beneficence) in order to make a few men rich. And one of them was the non-engraving engraver Cromeck.

After the bitter disappointments over The Grave and The Canterbury Pilgrims at the hand of Cromeck, Blake felt angry and resentful over the Chalcographic Society plan. In his "Public Address" he does not criticize the plan as much as he airs personal grievances triggered by certain words or phrases used by Cromeck in his promotional literature. "I account it a Public Duty," Blake writes, "respectfully to address myself to The Chalcographic Society & to Express to them my opinion ... that Engraving as an Art is Lost in England owing to an artfully propagated opinion that Drawing spoils an Engraver" (E560-561). While Blake's assertion is cast as a generalization about a perverse aesthetic dictum endemic in England, he is speaking specifically of Cromeck's explanation for denying him engraving opportunities. Later in the "Public Address" he writes:
To what is it that Gentlemen of the first Rank both in Genius & Fortune have subscribed their praise[?] To My Inventions[!] the Executive part they never disputed[!] the Lavish praise I have received from all Quarters for Invention and Drawing has Generally been accompanied by this[!] he can conceive but he cannot Execute[!] this Absurd assertion has done me & may still do me the greatest mischief[!] I call for Public protection against these Villains[!] I am like others Just Equal in Invention & in Execution as my works shew.

(E571)

Chief among these Villains is Cromek, who had written to Blake in his letter of May 1807 that “The most effectual way of benefiting a designer whose aim is general patronage is to bring his designs before the public through the medium of engraving.” Cromek claimed that Blake had profited from his Grave designs because Schiavonetti had engraved them: “Your drawings have had the good fortune to be engraved by one of the first artists in Europe, and the specimens already shown have already produced you orders that I verily believe you otherwise w'd not have rec’d.” Any commissions Blake received because of the success of his Grave designs did not, however, counteract the damage Cromek did to Blake’s artistic reputation in explaining why he hired Schiavonetti to engrave his designs. Robert T. Stothard, Thomas Stothard’s son, reported: “I have heard it stated by my father that Cromek got Blake to make for him a series of drawings from Blair’s ‘Grave.’” Cromek found, and explained to his father, that he had etched one of the subjects, but so indifferently and so carelessly … that he employed Schrovenetti [sic] to engrave them.” The anonymous reviewer of *The Grave* in the November 1808 *Antebotic Review* converted Cromek’s explanation into the statement that Blake had given up engraving because his ability was so limited: “Mr. Blake was formerly an engraver, but his talents in that line scarcey advancing to mediocrity, he was induced, as we have been informed, to direct his attention to the art of design.” In this way, Cromek advanced the prevarication that Blake “can conceive but … cannot Execute.”

Blake, however, finds this separation of his talents both arbitrary and self-serving: “I do not believe that this Absurd opinion ever was set on foot till in my Outset into life [when] it was artfully published both in whispers & in print by Certain persons whose robberies from me made it necessary to them that I should be hid in a corner[!] it never was supposed that a Copy could be better than an original or near so Good till a few Years ago [when] it became the interest of certain envious Knaves” (E571). He firmly maintains, in opposition to Cromek and others, that invention and execution are one and the same: “Ideas cannot be Given but in their minutely Appropriate Words nor Can a Design be made without its minutely Appropriate Execution” (E565). Blake offers to the Chalcographic Society as proof of his argument his engraving of *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, “of which Drawing is the Foundation & indeed the Superstructure” (E561). Indeed, Blake hopes that “this Print will redeem my Country from this Coxcomb situation & shew that it is only some Lamen advertisements in Newspapers are no proof of Popular approbation. but often the Contrary” (E562).

On this point of promoting art on the basis of current popular tastes, however, Blake is less firm, for elsewhere he chooses to follow his own sense of true art, rather than to depend upon its popular reception. Cromek, who is simply interested in securing immediate financial success, places art in the service of commercial gain, thereby inadverately debasing it. Elsewhere in his Notebook, Blake elucidates Cromek’s formula for success:

- **English Encouragement of Art**
  - Cromeks opinions put into Rhyme
  - If you mean to Please Every body you will
  - Set to work both Ignorance & skill
  - For a great Madjority are Ignorant
  - And skill to them seems raving & rant
  - Like putting oil & water into a lamp
  - Twill make a great splutter with smoke & damp
  - For there is no use as it seems to me
  - Of lighting a Lamp when you dont wish to see

(E501)

The art that Cromek promotes appeals to a “great Madjority” of the English public, for most people confuse Cromek’s “raving & rant” and “great splutter” with the excellence he claims to be promoting. The best that can be said about this art is that it satisfies conventional taste, for it is simply the “Labour of Ignorant Journeymen Suited to the Purposes of Commerce … its insatiable Maw must be fed by What all can do Equally well” (E562). This same “great Madjority” regards such imaginative inventions as those of Blake to be works of, in Robert Hunt’s words, “an unfortunate lunatic.” As Blake sees it, then, the Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving will be selling ordinary engraving produced by ordinary engravers for extraordinary sums. They are no great works, and they will not advance the status of engraving. Cromek is practicing a chimerical art, and great sums of money can work no alchemy. “It is Nonsense for Noblemen & Gentlemen to offer Premium for the Encouragement of Art when such Pictures as these can be done without Premiums[!] let them Encourage what Exists Already & no endeavour to counteract by tricks” (E566).

Blake’s fury in his “Public Address” extends even to Woollett an
Strange, the two exalted engravers mentioned in Cromek's advertisement for the Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving. As Robert N. Essick points out, Blake's severe words about "the most famous names in the history of English line engraving and thus Blake's natural allies against the mezzotinters and stipple engravers" seem strange. But Blake's first interest here is in demolishing the high-flown claims of the Chalographic Society plan. If the Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving wishes to be known by its gods, Blake will show them who their gods really are. Woollett and Strange were "heavy lumps of Cunning & Ignorance" and neither actually engraved his own works; Woollett's were completed by Jack Brown and Strange's by "Aliamet & his French journeymen whose names I forget" (E563). Patrons of the Society will receive nothing like works of art; "Such Print as Woollett & Strange produced will do for those who choose to purchase the Lives labour of Ignorance & Imbecillity in Preference to the Inspired Moments of Genius & Animation" (E563). These vituperations are less Blake's judgment of Woollett and Strange than they are his attack on the Chalographic Society.

If Blake had decided to publish his "Public Address," he might have tempered his words—or he might have extended his list of charges against Cromek and the Chalographic Society. As it turned out, there was no need for him to do either, since the Chalographic Society plan finally came to nothing. At least one other criticism of the Chalographic Society plan was published, however. That was a pamphlet titled "A Letter to a Member of the Society for encouraging the Art of Engraving, in objection to the Scheme of Patronage now under consideration, and written with a view to its Improvement" by the engraver John Landseer. I have unfortunately not been able to find a copy of Landseer's pamphlet, but Robert Hunt's response to it in the August 19, 1810 Examiner outlines many of Landseer's charges (pp. 521-23). Landseer questions the engraving talents of the Chalographic Society members, finds the Chalographic Society dictatorial in specifying the paintings to be engraved, rather than allowing each engraver to choose his own, charges the Chalographic Society with attempting to monopolize the English engraving market, and asserts that the money left after the engravers have been paid will not be enough to establish a gallery and museum of engravings, a school for engravers, and a fund for incapacitated and retired engravers. Landseer also raises technical questions about the size and number of engravings proposed in the scheme and whether proof impressions intended for shareholders are necessarily the best impressions of engravings. Robert Hunt, who states he has "publicly as well as privately recommended" the Chalographic Socie-

ty plan, answers each of Landseer's charges: not all the engravings will be done by Chalographic Society members; the choice of the painting is immaterial to an engraver, since "Engravings, which though so difficult of execution when well done, are but translations of the thoughts of others into a different language,—copies, by the medium of lines and dots, of forms previously made in painting"; and any Committee having Mr. Whitbread as a member is financially responsible and will carry out what it promises. Hunt asserts as well that "It cannot be supposed that Mr. L. would have made these objections, had he not been refused admittance into the Chalographic Society . . . on his requesting to become a member of it."

Hunt promises that "a Member of the Chalographic Society intends fully to reply to this Letter" and that "the pamphlet forthcoming . . . will satisfactorily dissipate Mr. L.'s doubts." The day after Hunt published his response to Landseer's pamphlet, August 20, 1810, Cromek wrote to James Elmes that "several gentlemen of the Chalographic Society" wished "to publish a reply to the calumnies of John Landseer," and that no doubt "the writing of the pamphlet will devolve to me." If Cromek ever wrote this pamphlet, no copy of it has been located, and it appears that Landseer's criticisms prevailed, in spite of Hunt's response and Cromek's intention to answer them. A little more than a year after the plan was announced, on June 24, 1811, Cromek wrote to George Clint, his fellow member of the Chalographic Society:

As you, like myself are one of "God's Elect"—i.e. predestined from all Eternity to be beggars, you will need no apology from me for looking on this dirty bit of paper. If you can decipher through the dirt my meaning, you will be informed that . . . [among the] professional members, the money was returned to the subscribers, and the Society was dissolved." These conclusions were not without some other basis.

The grandiose scheme and the Society which spawned it both were collapsing. Few Shareholders had been found to back the scheme, and the members of the Chalographic Society could not agree on an alternative plan. Nor could they find a basis for continuing their own organization. According to William Carey, "incurable jealousies and dissensions broke out . . . among the professional members, the money was returned to the subscribers, and the Society was dissolved." These conclusions were not without some other basis.
English society is debased and neutralized by Commerce and Manufactures. Cromeck’s words echo Blake’s “Public Address” statement that “Commerce is so far from being beneficial to Arts or Empire that it is destructive of both” (E562). For whatever reasons, engraving continued to remain a severely depressed art, in spite of the efforts of both Cromeck and Blake to change that condition. Nor could either man believe the other was capable of improving it. Cromeck believed Blake incapable of producing fine engravings, however inspired his imagination and however superb his designs might be. Blake believed Cromeck to be a man of commonplace taste intent on securing his personal profit from the talents of others. Nowhere in his “Public Address” does Blake name Cromeck, but in one place he seems on the brink of doing so: “M’B thinks it is his duty to Caution the Public against a Certain Imposter who” (E570)—but he never completed the sentence. Instead, Blake chose not to combat Cromeck publicly, perhaps because he found the battle too demeaning, perhaps because he did not want to risk the determination of its outcome on the fickle nature of popular taste—or perhaps because he believed finally that Cromeck would be defeated by others or his own overweening ambition. Cromeck met one fate; Blake another. For the rest of his life, Blake was seldom employed as a commercial engraver, devoting himself to projects which required no public approbation. No single man can have had more to do with this course of action than Cromeck. 19

Denison University

NOTES

1 The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman, 4th printing, rev. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 495, 500-01. Hereafter, references to this edition will be incorporated parenthetically in the text and indicated with the prefix E.


4 The title was first used by Alexander Gilchrist in his Life of William Blake (London: Macmillan, 1863). In their Blake’s Poetry and Design (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 417, Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant extend the title to “A Public Address to the Chalographic Society,” although they state that “there seems to have been no actual group calling itself ‘The Chalographic Society.’” They speculate that “Blake intended his address to be a printed oration” similar to Milton’s Areopagitica. Blake wrote this essay on thirty-four pages of his Notebook, often crowding his words on pages he had used previously. The order of these pages containing parts of the “Public Address” is a major editorial problem and finally remains conjectural in places. I have chosen to follow Erdman’s editorial arrangement (E560-71) here. See also The Notebook of William Blake, rev. ed., ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Readex Books, 1977).

5 The Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in Great Britain, founded in 1754, was also commonly truncated to the Society for the Encouragement of Arts. Blake may have confused the Chalographic Society’s ad hoc organization with it.

6 The reviews are reprinted in Blake Records, pp. 195-97 and 215-18.

7 Because this seems to be the first public announcement of the Chalographic Society scheme, the date of February 4, 1810 is, I believe, a more accurate terminus a quo for the “Public Address” than 1809, the date given by Erdman (Notebook, p. 13 and Table III).

8 Charles Warren (1767-1823), the President of the Chalographic Society, was a well-known engraver of small book-illustrations. He was also, according to the Royal Academy of 1805, a committee member of the Society of Engravers, established in 1803 under the patronage of the Prince of Wales.

9 West had written in a postscript to his letter to Schiavonetti, “The indisposition which has confined me to my bed and room for the last six weeks I still labour under, which will deprive me of that gratification I otherwise should have in dining with the Gentlemen of the Ch[alographic] Society on the 26th [i.e., 25th] instant.” He lived another decade, dying on March 11, 1820 at the age of eighty-one.

10 John Emery (1777-1822) was a popular Covent Garden actor who achieved renown for his playing of rural characters. Mr. Taylor presumably was also an actor.

11 Thomas Hope (1770?-1831), Vice President of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, was one of two connoisseurs (the other was William Lorne, Jr. [1732-1810], DNB, q.v.) who were original subscribers to The Graces.

12 David’s Death of Socrates (1787) was engraved by Jean Massard le père (1740-1822) in 1795.

13 Letter in the possession of Mr. Paul Warrington, quoted with permission.

14 Blake Records, pp. 195, 197.

15 For a detailed discussion of Cromeck’s edition of Burns’s uncollected writings, see my “Practicing The Art of Purification: Cromeck, Roscoe, and Reliques of Burns,” NB, 35 (forthcoming).
This information is largely from DNB. The Duke of Gloucester, however, has no entry, my bro.,...details are taken from his obituary in Gentleman's Magazine, n.s. III (January 1835), 86-89. The DNB also has no entry for Mr. J. P. Anderson, and I have not been able to learn anything about him elsewhere. Could he be related to James Hughes Anderson, the later nineteenth-century art enthusiast whose interlaced Royal Academy Catalogues are in the British Museum - Department of Prints and Drawings and the Royal Academy Library?

The print publisher John Boydell commissioned William Woollett (1735-1785) to engrave West's Death of Wolfe (1771), and, following its completion in 1776, "it broke all records in sales and was copied by the best engravers in Paris and Vienna." (Robert C. Alberts, Benjamin West, [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978], p. 110). By 1790 Boydell had earned fifteen thousand pounds from the sale of the engraving. The dimensions of the engraving are 18-1/2 x 23-1/2 inches. Stuart Gilbey painted a portrait of Woollett at work on the engraving; it is now in the National Gallery, London.

Robert Strange (1721-1792) and William Woollett were the two most venerated English engravers of the eighteenth century. Strange also worked incessantly to establish engraving as an art in England; his "Inquiry into the Rise and Establishment of the Royal Academy of Arts" (1775) argues that engravers should be admitted as full members to the Academy. DNB states that "his title to fame rests as much on the large share he had in the amelioration of the national taste as on the works which testify to his genius." Woollett's forte was landscape engraving; his famous engraving of West's Death of Wolfe has been already mentioned. A representative large engraving of either man would be fifteen by twenty inches. Invoking the names of Strange and Woollett, however, is obviously an attempt to suggest that the quality of the engravings, not simply their size, would be equal to that of Strange's and Woollett's.

In the Sheffield City Library Archives, Sheffield Literary & Philosophical Society [NLSP] 36, 208, quoted with permission from Mr. Robert F. Atkins; F.L.A., Director. Cromek advises Montgomery that the Prospectuses mentioned in the advertisement will be sent "by the next mail's Parcel from Longman." However, I have not been able to find any such Prospectus, and it is possible that none was ever printed.


This paragraph did not appear in Cromek's obituary of Schiavanetti published in the July 1, 1810 Examiner, pp. 412-14.

In Thomas H. Cromek's "List of engravings by R. H. Cromek" appended to his unpublished MS, "Memorials of R. H. Cromek" (1863), there is a gap of four years between Cromek's engraved portrait of Dr. Currie of Liverpool in 1807 and his engravings of Stothard's designs for the Works of Burns in 1811. The list by Cromek's son is the most complete inventory of Cromek's works that I have ever seen, and I know of no other engraving compiled by Cromek between 1807 and . . . . The following quotation is from Thomas H. Cromek's "Recollections of Conversations with Mr. John Pye ..." London 1863-4, unpublished MS in the possession of Mr. Paul Warrington. Quoted with permission.

In the possession of Mr. Paul Warrington.

Twenty-five years later the lot of English engravers was essentially the same. In Evidence Relating to the Art of Engraving ... (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1836), John Pye states that engravers of that day "are only drawn into notice through the medium of printsmen and booksellers. They have no direct patronage among the rich, as far as I know; I have known but one amateur patron of engraving in my day" (p. 37).

Blake Records, p. 185.


Blake Records, p. 200. Bentley suggests that the informant was Thomas Phillips, who painted Blake's portrait for the frontispiece to The Grave; I believe a more likely candidate is Cromek himself, who, according to the reviewer, was given Blake's portrait by Phillips (Blake Records, p. 208).

I have chosen to quote Blake's intermediate version of this satirical poem. Blake's original phrase for "a great majesty" was "a great multiplicity" and his final phrase "a great conquest." For the purposes of this paper I find the usually neglected phrase most satisfactory.

Blake Records, p. 216. Blake wrote in the first draft of his Notebooks poem, "Blakes apology for his Catalogue," "Thus Poor Schiavonetti died of the Cromek / A thing thats tied around the Examiners neck / who cries all art is a fraud & genius a trick / and Blake is an unfortunate Lunatic."

William Blake Printmaker, p. 199.

Essick provides details on both John Browne and Francois germain Aliamet in William Blake Printmaker, p. 203.

Landseer had argued in a series of lectures to the Royal Academy in 1806 that engravers should be considered for full membership. See his Lectures on the Art of Engraving (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807).

Letter in the possession of Mr. Paul Warrington, quoted with permission. James Elmes (1782-1862), an architect, was at this time an editor of The Monthly Magazine, which also published stories on the Chalcographic Society and the Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving in its numbers of June 1 (pp. 481-82), July 1 (p. 578), and December 1, 1810 (p. 442). The information in these stories is essentially the same as that published in The Examiner. In 1813, Elmes published a pamphlet titled A Letter to Thomas Hope... on the insufficiency of the existing
estabishments for promoting the fine arts, towards that of architecture and its professors, etc.

35 Letter in the possession of Mr. Paul Warrington, quoted with permission.


37 Letter in the Liverpool City Libraries, quoted with permission.

38 A shorter version of this essay was presented at the Annual Meeting of the South Central Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, March 7, 1981. The University of Texas at Austin. I wish to thank Robert N. Essick, G. E. Bentley, Jr., and John E. Grant for their sensitive readings of earlier drafts. Many of their suggestions have been incorporated in this final version.

The Concluding Moral in Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

ARNOLD E. DAVIDSON

The artistic propriety of the moral that concludes The Rime of the Anc. Mariner was questioned by both Coleridge and Mrs. Barbauld during course of their well-known exchange. Consistent with that beginning, same matter is still being argued in mostly negative terms. 1 Certainly, 'final moral has been much disliked.' 2 But I would suggest that recent long standing condemnations of the poem's conclusion—regrettable "v. dictory piety," a "moralizing . . . non sequitor," the "pietistic rationalization of a "disoriented" man—represent a sense of critical disappointment that is not justified. 3 The Rime of the Ancient Mariner terminates with the Mariner addressing the still obtuse Wedding-Guest, not with the Poet addressing the discriminating reader. In short, Coleridge, at the end of poem, does not attempt to provide a final lesson in moral truth, a salut dessert served up after a feast of vicarious adventure. As I will subsequently argue, if we examine what the Mariner's parting counsel must context, mean and how that meaning relates to his earlier experience, can begin to see the ways in which the often dismissed final stanzas integral to the poem as a whole.

The work itself cannot be read as a dramatic monologue, for "Mariner's narrative, though it constitutes nearly all of the poem, is actly a part of the dialogue between the Mariner and the Wedding-Guest Yet Charles A. Owen, Jr. did not go on to elucidate the point and purp of the dialogue that he saw as basic to the poem. His oversight, however, was soon partly remedied by another essay that persuasively examined role played in the poem by the "Mariner's hapless auditor." As W. Pafford points out, "the experience of the Wedding-Guest is, on a subor nate level, parallel to that of the Ancient Mariner," and that para