

## The Context of Blake's "Public Address": Cromek and The Chalcographic Society

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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 Screwmuch" and charges that he is "A Petty sneaking Knave" who loves "the Art to Cheat."<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

Blake's most sustained argument against this project is advanced in his Notebook draft titled "Public Address" by modern editors.<sup>4</sup> Nominally conceived as an advertisement for his proposed *Canterbury Pilgrims* engraving, Blake's "Public Address" in fact is much more concerned with

this project of the Chalcographic Society (which Blake names five times) or, alternatively, of its subsidiary Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving (which Blake twice truncates to "the Society for Encouragement of Arts").<sup>5</sup> Establishing the Cromekian context of Blake's "Public Address" clarifies much in this ambiguous and unfinished essay and enables us to form a better understanding of what was at issue and why Blake spoke so intensely about it.

Between February 4 and August 19, 1810, six stories about the Chalcographic Society appeared in *The Examiner*, the weekly publication established in 1808 and edited by Robert and Leigh Hunt. Robert Hunt's scathing reviews of Blake's *Grave* designs in the August 7, 1808 *Examiner* and Blake's Public Exhibition in the September 17, 1809 *Examiner* are both well known;<sup>6</sup> Blake refers to them in his "Public Address" as examples of the way "in which my Character has been blasted these thirty years both as an artist & a Man" (E568). In the February 4, 1810 *Examiner* appears a letter from Benjamin West to Louis Schiavonetti dated January 23, 1810 which endorses "a Plan for the Regeneration of the almost dormant Art of Engraving: a Plan which will be shortly submitted by the C[h]alographic Society to the consideration and encouragement of the leading Patrons of the Fine Arts." West, President of the Royal Academy since 1806, had long supported advancing engraving to the status of a fine art and favored full membership to the Royal Academy for engravers. West wrote to Schiavonetti, "I have to acknowledge the receipt of your obliging letter, which conveyed to me the Paper from the Members of the C[h]alographic Society: and I have to request you will take the first opportunity to answer these Gentlemen that I have attentively perused their Paper—and do highly approve of their plan and zeal for promoting the Art of Engraving in this country." The rest of the letter is given to more general remarks about the advancement of the fine arts in England. Preceding West's letter is a paragraph describing the Chalcographic Society:

The Society was established three years since [i.e., in 1807], for the purpose of promoting the extensively useful, and elegant Art of Engraving. Its third Anniversary was most harmoniously and convivially commemorated by its highly respectable Members last Thursday week [January 25], at which Mr. Warren presided.<sup>7</sup> The following toasts were given—"The C[h]alographic Society—May its endeavours to promote and improve the Art of Engraving be successfull"—"The Royal Academy."—"Mr. West, its venerable President. May he speedily recover from his present indisposition, and long live an ornament to the British School of Art." This was drank [sic] with enthusiasm."<sup>8</sup>—"The Pencil, Chisel, and Graver. May their efforts unite to support and improve the Arts of the British Empire."—"Mr. Stothard. May his *Canterbury Pilgrims*, bearing each a *genuine* character in his countenance, find an English welcome every where."—"The admirers and encouragers of the Art of Engraving." Messrs. Emery and Taylor exerted their best powers of entertainment.<sup>10</sup> Many eminent Artists, Amateurs, and Patrons honoured the Society with their presence. (p. 78)

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 Chalcographic 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.<sup>11</sup> 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? . . .<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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."<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps more instructive than these mitigating explanations, however, is the observation that in practically all his dealings with others Cromek 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. Cromek 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." Cromek did not take 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 C[h]alcographic 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 C[h]alcographic 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.<sup>16</sup> The association of these prominent connoisseurs with the Chalcographic Society plan indicates how ambitious an undertaking it was, much more ambitious than anything Cromek 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*";<sup>17</sup> 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 Cromek 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 restore 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

Clydsdale

Earl of Dartmouth

Sir John Fleming Leycester, Bart.

Sir Mark Sykes, Bart.

(The Committee of Managers appointed for conducting the business.)

Sir Abraham Hume, Bart.

Sir Thomas Bernard, Bart.

William Smith, Esq.

Samuel Whitbread, Esq.

Thomas Hope, Esq.

J. P. Anderdon, Esq.

Prospectuses of the Society's Plan may be had of [blank space; "Miss Gales, booksellers, Sheffield" written in], and of the Secretary to the Chalcographic 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."<sup>20</sup> 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 Chalcographic 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-*

zine, 80 (Supplement to January-June, 1810), 665: J[ohn] Scott, [Charles] Warren, [William] Bromley, E[dward] Scriven (these four earlier designated "the oldest members of the Chalcographic Society"), [William] Skelton, [William] Bond, [Samuel] Middiman, [Thomas] Cheesman, [George] Clint, [James] Ward, and Cromek.<sup>21</sup> Excepting Cromek, 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;<sup>22</sup> 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.

Cromek'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 Cromek's son that "Your father never engraved if he could get anyone to work for him: he did not like it."<sup>23</sup> Several ties between Cromek 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 Cromek in 1808. In a letter postmarked August 7, 1809, Cromek directs his sister to deliver a drawing to Middiman, who is to engrave it for fifteen guineas.<sup>24</sup> Later in 1810 Cromek engaged Bromley to complete Schiavonetti's etching of Stothard's *Canterbury Pil-*

*grims*, announcing the arrangement in the September 2, 1810 *Examiner* (p. 554). As the Secretary of the Chalcographic Society, Cromek combined zeal with determination to advance a scheme which would generously support Chalcographic society members. Cromek'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 embargoed 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.<sup>25</sup> 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 renames them "The Cunning sures & 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 Cromek.

After the bitter disappointments over *The Grave* and *The Canterbury Pilgrims* at the hand of Cromek, 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 Cromek 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 Cromek'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 Names[?] 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<sup>d</sup> not have rec<sup>d</sup>." Any commissions Blake received because of the success of his *Grave* designs did not, however, countervail 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 my father, that he had etched one of the subjects, but so indifferently and so carelessly . . . that he employed Schrovenetti [sic] to engrave them."<sup>27</sup> The anonymous reviewer of *The Grave* in the November 1808 *Antijacobin 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 scarcely advancing to mediocrity, he was induced, as we have been informed, to direct his attention to the art of design."<sup>28</sup> 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 Englishmen and not All who are thus ridiculous in their Pretenses[.] Advertizements 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 inalterably 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)<sup>29</sup>

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."<sup>30</sup> As Blake sees it, then, the Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving will be selling ordinary engravings produced by ordinary engravers for extraordinary sums. They are not 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 and

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.<sup>11</sup> But Blake's first interest here is in demolishing the high-flown claims of the Chalcographic 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).<sup>12</sup> Patrons of the Society will receive nothing like works of art; "Such Prints as Woollett & Strange produced will do for those who choose to purchase the Lifes 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 Chalcographic 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 Chalcographic Society. As it turned out, there was no need for him to do either, since the Chalcographic Society plan finally came to nothing. At least one other criticism of the Chalcographic 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 Chalcographic Society members, finds the Chalcographic Society dictatorial in specifying the paintings to be engraved, rather than allowing each engraver to choose his own, charges the Chalcographic 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 Chalcographic Socie-

ty plan, answers each of Landseer's charges: not all the engravings will be done by Chalcographic 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 Chalcographic Society . . . on his requesting to become a member of it."

Hunt promises that "a Member of the Chalcographic 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 Chalcographic 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."<sup>14</sup> 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 Chalcographic 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 decypher through the dirt my meaning, you will be informed that as Thursday is the day of our monthly meeting, and as something decisive should be done, I hope you will not fail to attend. Should there be a tolerably full meeting we shall then be enabled either to dissolve the Chalcographic Society or to place it upon some other basis.<sup>15</sup>

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 Chalcographic 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."<sup>16</sup> These conclusions were no doubt hastened by Cromek's own ill health, which prohibited his active participation in both the Society and its scheme. He died of consumption on March 14, 1812.

An irony in this history of antagonisms between Blake and Cromek can be found in Cromek's complaint to William Roscoe in his letter of December 22, 1810 that the arts in present-day England fare so badly because

English society is debased and neutralized by Commerce and Manufactures."<sup>1</sup> Cromek'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 Cromek and Blake to change that condition. Nor could either man believe the other was capable of improving it. Cromek believed Blake incapable of producing fine engravings, however inspired his imagination and however superb his designs might be. Blake believed Cromek 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 Cromek, but in one place he seems on the brink of doing so: "M<sup>r</sup> 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 Cromek 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 Cromek would be defeated by others or his own overweening ambition. Cromek 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 Cromek.<sup>18</sup>

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## 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.
- 2 The information related to these two projects may be conveniently reviewed in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 166-74, 179-210, and 215-22. See also Bentley's "Blake and Cromek: The Wheat and the Tares," *MP*, 71 (1974), 366-79 and my "Cromek's Provincial Advertisements for Blake's *Grave*," *N&Q*, n.s. 27 (1980), 73-76.
- 3 Bentley (*William Blake's Writings* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1978], II, 1030 n. 2) confuses the Chalcographic Society with the Society of Engravers, a distinctly separate organization, while Robert N. Essick (*William Blake Printmaker* [Princeton U. Press, 1980], p. 198 n. 1) denies the existence of the Chalcographic Society.

- 4 The title was first used by Alexander Gilchrist in his *Life of William Blake* (London: Macmillan, 1863). In their *Blake's Poetry and Designs* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 417, Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant extend the title to "A Public Address to the Chalcographic Society," although they state that "there seems to have been no actual group calling itself 'The Chalcographic 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 Chalcographic 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 Chalcographic 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 Chalcographic Society, was a well known engraver of small book-illustrations. He was also, according to the *Royal Kalendar* 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 Chalcographic Society on the 26th [i.e., 25th] instant." He lived another decade, dying on March 11, 1820 at the age of eight-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 Locke, Jr. [1732-1810], *DNB*, q.v.) who were original subscribers to *The Grave*.
- 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 Cromek's edition of Burns's uncollected writings, see my "Practicing 'The Art of Purification': Cromek, Roscoe, and *Reliques of Burns*," *SB*, 35 (forthcoming).



- 16 This information comes largely from *DNB*. The Duke of Gloucester, however, has no entry; my biographical 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. Anderdon, and I have not been able to learn anything about him elsewhere. Could he be related to James Hughes Anderdon, the later nineteenth-century art enthusiast whose interleaved Royal Academy Catalogues are in the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings and the Royal Academy Library?
- 17 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 by 23-1/2 inches. Stuart Gilbert painted a portrait of Woollett at work on the engraving; it is now in the National Gallery, London.
- 18 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.
- 19 In the Sheffield City Library Archives, Sheffield Literary & Philosophical Society [SLPS] 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 month's Parcel from Longmans." However, I have not been able to find any such Prospectus, and it is possible that none was ever printed.
- 20 Quoted in Richard and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, ed. Ruthven Todd (London: Phaidon, 1947), p. 192. For a brief account of the British Institution see William T. Whitley, *Art in England: 1800-1820* (Cambridge U. Press, 1928), pp. 106-07. See also Thomas Smith, ed., *Recollections of the British Institution . . . and Biographical Notices of the Artists Who Have Received Premiums, etc. 1805-1859* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, [etc.], 1860) and Algernon Graves, *The British Institution 1806-1867: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from the Foundation* (London: G. Bell and A. Graves, 1908).
- 21 This paragraph did not appear in Cromek's obituary of Schiavonetti published in the July 1, 1810 *Examiner*, pp. 412-14.
- 22 Coincidentally, "William Bond" is also the title of Blake's last poem in the Pickering Manuscript (ca. 1807) (E487-89).
- 23 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 encountered, and I know of no other engraving completed by Cromek between 1807 and 1811. The Pye 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.
- 24 In the possession of Mr. Paul Warrington.
- 25 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 printers 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).
- 26 *Blake Records*, p. 185.
- 27 "Stothard and Blake," *The Athenaeum*, no. 1886 (December 19, 1863), 838; quoted in *Blake Records*, p. 172. The engraving is probably of "Death's Door," reproduced in Geoffrey Keynes, *Engravings by William Blake: The Separate Plates* (Dublin: Emery Walker, 1956), pl. 25.
- 28 *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).
- 29 I have chosen to quote Blake's intermediate version of this satirical poem. Blake's original phrase for "a great Madjority" was "a great multitud" and his final phrase "a great Conquest." For the purposes of this paper I find the usually neglected phrase most satisfactory.
- 30 *Blake Records*, p. 216. Blake wrote in the first draft of his Notebook 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."
- 31 *William Blake Printmaker*, p. 199.
- 32 Essick provides details on both John Browne and François germain Aliamet in *William Blake Printmaker*, p. 203.
- 33 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).
- 34 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*

*establishments 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.
- 36 *Some Memoirs of the Patronage and Progress of the Fine Arts in England and Ireland* (London, 1826), p. 133.
- 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 Ancient 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.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, "final moral has been much disliked."<sup>2</sup> But I would suggest that recent long standing condemnations of the poem's conclusion—regrettable "vindicatory piety," a "moralizing . . . *non sequitor*," the "pietistic rationalization" of a "disoriented" man—represent a sense of critical disappointment that is not justified.<sup>3</sup> *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 salutary dessert served up after a feast of vicarious adventure. As I will subsequently argue, if we examine what the Mariner's parting counsel must mean in context, mean and how that meaning relates to his earlier experience, we can begin to see the ways in which the often dismissed final stanzas are integral to the poem as a whole.

The work itself cannot be read as a dramatic monologue, for the Mariner's narrative, though it constitutes nearly all of the poem, is actually 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 purpose of the dialogue that he saw as basic to the poem. His oversight, however, was soon partly remedied by another essay that persuasively examined the 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 subordinate level, parallel to that of the Ancient Mariner," and that para-