

## WILLIAM BLAKE AND THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS



The 1790s is one of the most important decades of modern history and culture; the industrial revolution was well on its way, and the influence of this together with the American and French revolutions on literature and culture of this period cannot be overestimated. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1775-76) inspired the war for American independence and set in motion a revolutionary discourse culminating in the so-called war of pamphlets after Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) argued against the ongoing Revolution in France. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is an extension of the revolution controversy and the abolitionist debate at the time. In the middle of these turbulent times we find William Blake; printer, engraver, painter, poet and revolutionary.

In this course we will examine how Blake adopts and adapts ideas from this discourse in his own poetry of the 1790s. We will start with a brief look at selected plates of Blake's poetry from the reading list before we move on to discuss Blake's engagement with the texts of Paine, Burke, and Wollstonecraft more specifically in the five poems: *The French Revolution*; *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; *America, a Prophecy*; *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*; and *The Song of Los*. This entails a closer look at notions of the author, using Roland Barthes' and Michel Foucault's ideas as a starting point, and a critical engagement with different notions of intertextuality, particularly that of Roland Barthes. This will allow us to examine some of the underlying structures of the texts from this period, while also expanding our understanding of how texts by an individual writer embody a larger socio-political discourse.

Students are expected to participate actively in the seminar. Part of this involves preparing questions for discussion as well as preparing textual/visual commentary on the Blake texts.

Illustration: W. Blake *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 15, copy H, (Fitzwilliam Museum).

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: Primary texts by Blake are available free online in *The William Blake Archive* [www.blakearchive.org](http://www.blakearchive.org). All other required reading will either be available at Studia (for the books), or can be downloaded from the File Storage on My Space.

*NB! Texts marked with an asterisk\* in the schedule are recommended additional reading.*

*There will be two extra sessions devoted to the extra reading material for students doing the course as 337L. These will be scheduled in agreement between the L-students and the seminar leader.*

**1. sem: 23 Jan**     **The Author in History:**

**Blake's Poetry (selections from the reading list)**

Mee, John "Blake's Politics in history" in *Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 133-149.

Roland Barthes "The Death of the Author" in *Image – Music- Text*, pp. 142-148.

Allen, Graham "Introduction" in *Intertextuality*, pp. 1-7, and Ch. 1, pp. 8-29

**2. sem: 30 Jan**     **The French Revolution:**

**William Blake, *The French Revolution***

**Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Excerpts, see reading list).**

Roland Barthes "From Work to Text" in *Image – Music- Text*, pp. 155-164

Allen, Graham *Intertextuality*, Ch. 2, pp. 59-91.

\*Lincoln, Andrew "Politics and Desire in Blake's *The French Revolution*", in *Blake, Politics, and History*, pp. 187-195.

**3. sem: 6 Feb**     **Revolutionary forces:**

**William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell***

Makdisi, Saree "The Political Aesthetic of Blake's images" in *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 110-132.

Michel Foucault "What is An Author?" pp. 101-120.

**4. sem: 13 Feb**     **Mobilizing the Past – The American Revolution:**

**William Blake, *America A Prophecy***

**Thomas Paine, *Common Sense***

Allen, Graham *Intertextuality*, Ch. 3, pp. 92-111.

\*Richey, William "'The Lion & Wolf shall cease': Blake's

*America as a Critique of Counter-Revolutionary Violence* in *Blake, Politics, and History*, pp. 196-211.

**Week 7-8: Choose and Discuss Topics for Term Paper**

- 5. sem: 20 Feb**    **Voices unheard; Abolitionism and Feminism:**  
**William Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion***  
**Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Excerpts, see reading list)**  
Mellor, Anne K. "Sex, Violence, and Slavery: Blake and Wollstonecraft" in *Images and Texts*, pp. 69-94.  
\*Blake's Illustrations to Stedman's *Narrative of a Five year Journey Among the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, available in the Blake Archive.

**Deadline: 28 Feb Hand in Outline for Term Paper w/ Bibliography**

**Week 10: Tutorial (15 min.) on Outline**

- 6. sem: 13 Mar**    **History as myth:**  
**William Blake, *The Song of Los***  
Williams, Nicholas S. "Edmund Burke and models of history in *America, The Song of Los*, and *The Four Zoas*, from *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 98-140.

**Deadline: 28 March Hand in Full Draft of Term Paper**

**Week 14 or 15: Tutorial on Full Draft**

- 7. sem.: 10 Apr**    **Larger Discussions: Blake and his Age**  
Lincoln, Andrew "From *America* to *The Four Zoas*" in *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 210-221.  
\*Simpson, David "Blake and Romanticism", *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 169-187.

- 8. sem.: 24 Apr**    **Repetition and Final Thoughts**  
Allan, Graham *Intertextuality* Ch. 6 pp. 203-216.

**NB! Deadline: 2. May, 12 p.m. – Hand in Term Paper.**

## Required Reading

### Primary texts:

Blake, William *The French Revolution*, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, Ed. David Erdman, Electronic Edition, 2001,  
available online in the William Blake Archive:

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

Blake, William *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, copy H, 1790 (Fitzwilliam Museum), available online in the William Blake Archive:

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/copy.xq?copyid=mhh.h&java=no>

Blake, William *America a Prophecy*, copy F, 1793 (British Museum),  
available online in the William Blake Archive:

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/copy.xq?copyid=america.f&java=no>

Blake, William *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, copy A, 1793 (British Museum),  
available online in the William Blake Archive:

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/copy.xq?copyid=vda.a&java=no>

Blake, William *Europe a Prophecy*, copy D, 1794, (British Museum), available online  
in the William Blake Archive:

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/copy.xq?copyid=europe.d&java=no>

Blake, William *The Song of Los*, copy D, 1795, (British Museum), available online in  
the William Blake Archive:

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/copy.xq?copyid=s-los.d&java=no>

Burke, Edmund *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford World's Classics),  
Ed. L. G. Mitchell, Oxford Paperbacks, 2009, (excerpts: pp. 3-4; 8-10; 20-40;  
47-50; 59-65; 69-73; 78-79; 90-91; 96-99; 139-144).

Paine, Thomas *Common Sense in Rights of Man, Common Sense, and Other Political Writings* (Oxford World's Classics), Ed. Mark Philip, Oxford Paperbacks,

2008, pp. 1-60.

Paine, Thomas *Rights of Man in Rights of Man, Common Sense, and Other Political Writings* (Oxford World's Classics), Ed. Mark Philip, Oxford Paperbacks, 2008, pp. 83-197.

Wollstonecraft, Mary from "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution: WITH "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman"* (Oxford World's Classics), Ed. Janet Todd, Oxford Paperbacks, 2008, (excerpts: pp. 71-75; 84-149; 198-220; 241-265; 280-283).

Theory and Criticism:

Allen, Graham *Intertextuality, The New Critical Idiom*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, "Introduction" pp. 1-7, Ch. 1: pp. 8-29 Ch. 2: pp. 59-91, Ch. 3: pp. 92-111, Ch. 6: pp. 203-216.

Barthes, Roland "The Death of the Author" in *Image – Music – Text*, Fontana Press, 1984, pp. 142-148.

Barthes, Roland "From Work to Text" in *Image – Music- Text*, Fontana Press, 1984, pp. 155-164.

Doyle, William *The French Revolution, A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, New York Oxford University Press, 2001.

Foucault, Michel "What is An Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow, New York Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 101-120.

Makdisi, Saree "The Political Aesthetic of Blake's images" in *Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, Ed. Morris Eaves, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 110-132.

Mee, John "Blake's Politics in history" in *Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, Ed. Morris Eaves, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 133-149.

Mellor, Anne K. "Sex, Violence, and Slavery: Blake and Wollstonecraft" in *Images and Texts*, pp. 69-94.

NB! Tolley, Michael J. "Europe: 'to those ychain'd in sleep'" in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, Eds. David Erdman and John E. Grant, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1970, (may be subject to change due to availability).

Williams, Nicholas S. "Edmund Burke and models of history in *America, The Song of*

*Los*, and *The Four Zoas*, in *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake* (Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 28), Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 98-140.

Recommended Additional Reading:

- Allen, Graham *Intertextuality*, The New Critical Idiom, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, (remaining pages).
- Blake, William *John Gabriel Stedman, Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, copy 1, 1796 (Collection of Robert N. Essick), (illustrations) available online in the William Blake Archive:  
<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/copy.xq?copyid=bb499.1&java=no>
- Lincoln, Andrew "Politics and Desire in Blake's *The French Revolution*", in *Blake, Politics, and History*, Eds. Jackie DiSalvo, G. A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson, New York and London, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998, pp. 187-195.
- Mitchell W. J. T "Blake's Composite Art" Ch. 1 in *Blake's Composite Art, a Study of the Illuminated Poetry*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 3-39
- Ryan, Robert "Blake and Religion" in *Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, Ed. Morris Eaves, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 150-168.
- Simpson, David "Blake and Romanticism" in *Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, Ed. Morris Eaves, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 169-187.