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Breaking the Contract between God
and the Visual-Literary Fusion: Illuminated Manuscripts,
William Blake and the Graphic Novel

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Abstract

This essay follows three different stages of the fusion of images and words in the tradition of the book. More specifically, it tackles the transformation undergone by the initially religious combination of visual figures and scriptural texts, exemplified by medieval illuminated manuscripts into the spiritual, non-dogmatic, illuminated books printed and painted by poet-prophet William Blake in a manner that combines mysticism and literature. Eventually, the analysis reaches the secularized genre of the graphic novel that renounces the metaphysical element embedded in the intertwining of the two media. If ninth-century manuscripts such as the *Book of Kells* were employed solely for divinely inspired renditions of religious texts, William Blake's late eighteenth-century illuminated books moved towards an individual, personal literature conveyed via unique pieces of art that asserted the importance of individuality in the process of creation. The modern rendition of the image-text illumination can be said to take the form of the graphic novel with writers such as Will Eisner and Alan Moore overtly expressing their indebtedness to the above-mentioned tradition by paying homage to William Blake in the pages of their graphic novels. However, the fully printed form of this twentieth-century literary genre, along with its separation from the intrinsic spirituality of the visual-literary fusion in order to meet the demands of a disenchanted era, necessarily re-conceptualize the notion of illumination.

Keywords: image-text, illuminated manuscripts, illuminated printing, graphic novel, secularization, the *Book of Kells*, William Blake, Will Eisner, *A Contract with God*, Alan Moore.

Whether we are talking about *videre verba* (the Latin phrase for ‘to see words’), *ImageText* – W.J.T. Mitchell’s understanding of “the composite, synthetic works or concepts that combine image and text” (89) – or *third text*,¹ the intricate fusion between literature and the visual culture is worthy of further exploration. The purpose of the present essay is to analyze the development of what seems to be a shift between three stages of the text-image tradition of the book. While the latter may be considered to also cover much earlier pieces of writing – such as ancient Egyptian scrolls which also made use of the combination between texts and images – this essay is limited to the concept of ‘book,’ be it a vellum codex, a printed-painted volume or a full graphic novel, which is distinguished from comic books or caricatures published in series.

The analysis will start with Medieval illuminated manuscripts, represented here by one of the world’s most famous examples of this artistic trend: the *Book of Kells*, it will continue with British poet and painter William Blake and his emblematic, illuminated *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and it will conclude with the twentieth century development of the modern graphic novel, exemplified primarily by Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God* and Alan Moore’s *From Hell* and *Watchman*. Although this topic deserves a much more complex and in-depth analysis that may tackle multiple different developments of the visual-literary fusion, for the purpose of this essay, the works discussed are considered famous and important enough within their respective categories in order to be illustrative of a more general trend. Moreover, the inquiry will rely on the specific approach towards the intertwining of image and word that the artists/authors of these works adopt, as well as the influence of their religious/visionary foundation or lack thereof, leading towards the questioning of the graphic novel as a valid link in the above-mentioned artistic chain.

As the Latin etymology² of the term ‘illuminated manuscript’ suggests, this precious object can be defined as a “handwritten book that has been decorated with gold or ... silver, brilliant colors, or elaborate designs or miniature pictures” (“Illuminated Manuscript”), applied on parchment or vellum during the middle ages. While it is easy to link the word “illuminated” to the beautiful embellishment of the text, to the

historiated initials, decorated borders and line-endings or to the accompanying miniatures adorned with leaves of precious metals, it should be noted that in medieval times, the word more often than not was infused with a deeply religious connotation. In “The Age of Faith,” religious art was a tool for teaching people how to read, while instilling a sense of community through the presentation of Christian stories and symbols. Consequently, the literate monks turned the scriptoria and libraries of monasteries into the main centers for the production and preservation of literary works.

Since most medieval illuminated manuscripts³ were religious texts created by scribes who faithfully rendered the words of the Bible, they were meant to *illuminate* the readers with the sacred faith of Christianity and enlighten them with the precious words of God. The images they contained were not merely decorative, but they also often illustrated and complemented the text, serving as visual markers of important passages and memorizing aids⁴ for monks (Endres 28) in the case of liturgical altar books such as the *Book of Kells*, and as imaginative contemplation incentives for dedicated believers in the case of the Books of Hours⁵ and Psalters⁶ such as the private *Luttrell Psalter*.⁷ They were all unique and luxurious pieces of art, as the expensive materials and the time-consuming process of creating everything by hand in a highly distinctive manner could only be afforded by wealthy patrons.

The most famous ninth-century medieval illuminated manuscript of the four Christian Gospels⁸ is surely the *Book of Kells*, the production and survival of which are shrouded in mystery.⁹ While most scholars agree that it was written at the monastery of Iona, on the west coast of Scotland and brought to Kells to avoid the Viking raids, the names and number of the scribes and illuminators involved in its production remain unknown and are a matter of dispute.¹⁰ Notably, thirteenth-century historian Giraldus Cambrensis attributed the nature of the astonishing artistic elements to divine inspiration.

There are almost innumerable ... drawings. If you ... penetrate with your eyes to the secrets of the artistry, you will notice such intricacies, so delicate and subtle, so close together and well-knitted, so involved and bound together, and so fresh still in their colorings that you will not

hesitate to declare that all these things must have been the result of the work, not of men, but of angels. (qtd. in Olsen 159)

It was little wonder that this illuminating altar book was considered to be a supernatural creation, as most such manuscripts were thought to be written with the help of angels and visions of saints; this made them holy, blessed objects that were not only held in great reverence, but were also thought to have healing powers (Jones). While there are many errors in the text based on the Vulgate, the Latin Bible translated by St. Jerome in the fourth century, its embellishment with intertwining images of animals, humans, angels, zoomorphic creatures, vines, spirals and knots is irreproachable. Illustrations of geometric, abstract or representational figures are found at the end of all lines, on the marginalia and between certain words to mark the beginning of important passages, but perhaps



Figure 1. Close-up of the Chi-Rho page from the *Book of Kells*
(*Oneonta.edu*)

most interestingly, the historiated initials and the first pages of the Gospels offer readers a new understanding of the relationship between text and image, for they often depict illustrations that either form the letters themselves, interact somehow with them by touching or holding them or find themselves within their very outline. This allows for the creation of a new medium that is close to what Stephen Behrendt calls the third space, “an interdisciplinary ‘metatext’ in which verbal and visual elements each offer their own particular and often irreconcilable contributions” (qtd. in Garrett-Petts and Lawrence 165).

For instance, the Gospel of Matthew starts with the words “*liber generationis*” (“the book of the generation”) enlarged so as to occupy the entire page; the figure of Matthew holding his book seems to hover in-between the letters ‘I’ and ‘B’ next to the head of an animal; there is an image of two creatures facing each other with their fangs interlocked resting on the letter ‘L,’ a small illustration of an angel trapped within the outer outline of the same letter and a serpent holding together letters ‘E’ and ‘R’ inside a golden spiral of extremely fine geometrical shapes and knot-work. A similar interdependency of letters and images is shown in the Chi-Rho page, where the minutely ornamented letters XPI (abbreviation of the word *Kristos*) [Figure 1] that mark the birth of Jesus Christ with the eighteenth line of the Gospel are surrounded by myriad drawings. There are lines that are “straight, curved, coiled, or step-like, interlaced in ribbons or zoomorphic forms, with a profusion of dots ... characteristic of the style” (Quaile 39-40). In addition, there are illustrations such as that of a cat and mice harmoniously sharing a communion wafer at the base of the large letter X. Three angels are resting on the same letter alongside two butterflies facing each other and figures of humans and snakes at the center, inside the outline. In addition, there seem to be moths inside the letters ‘I’ and ‘P,’ and the latter’s spiral ends with the head of a beardless man. The fact that the images do not relate directly to the text, but create their own narrative makes it almost impossible for critics to reach the same conclusions regarding their significance.

The last example of this kind to be discussed here is the beginning to the Gospel of Luke that beautifully represents the word *quoniam*

(‘forasmuch’), the beginning of the phrase “forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us” (Luke 1:1).¹¹ If between the letters ‘Q’ and ‘U’ there are four naked human figures with all their members knotted together, around ‘NIAM,’ there are many images of people either hiding, holding, or sitting on top of the letters. A possible interpretation might be the fact that these are representations of the individuals mentioned on the following folio, who have declared in writing the things recorded by the Gospel. However, the monstrous figure whose legs can be seen at the bottom of the letter ‘U’ and whose head appears on top of it is left to the imagination of the reader. In fact, many of the artistic touches spring from the imaginative minds of their illustrators and, while not always referring to something specifically denoted by the words on the page and sometimes even transforming images into letters, they add an almost infinite dimension of possible meanings to the text, “elucidating, or otherwise complicating our responses” (Garrett-Petts and Lawrence 165).

Paying homage to this sacred art, about a millennium later, in the heart of England, pre-romantic poet, engraver, painter and visionary Blake proudly declared he had invented something he called illuminated printing,¹² “a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet” (qtd. in “Illuminated Printing”). In practice, this was achieved through what is now known as relief etching, with outlines written and drawn backwards on copper plates with acid resistant ink that would allow for the rest of the plate to be etched with acid to make the design stand in relief. The latter would then be inked, printed on paper under light pressure and beautifully enlightened by hand with vivid colors (Eaves 37). Although the strong bond between image and text is kept along with the delicate calligraphic lettering, the abstract, ornamental embellishments, as well as the human and animal figures, Blake is not interested in copying the Scripture, but rather in creating spiritually enlightened and enlightening literary texts himself and thus “*produce* new designs rather than reproduce” (Viscomi) those of others. Although he did not afford to adorn his work with precious materials, he still created limited editions because turning the “form of the book [into] a medium for creative

expression” (Petersen 57) was a delicate, time-consuming task, while also making sure that each plate was illuminated by means of watercolors.

Just as the *Book of Kells* was said to have been the work of angels, Blake claimed that his inspiration was of divine nature as well. Not only did he maintain that the idea for this artistic process came to him through a vision of the spirit of his beloved deceased brother Robert, but he also considered himself a prophet who wrote spontaneously, on the dictation of angels, as he overtly declares in a letter he writes to his friend Thomas Butts: “I have written this poem from immediate Dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without Premeditation & even against my Will” (Blake, *A Critical* 71) and “I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily & Nightly” (Blake, *A Critical* 67). However, the poet frowned upon institutionalized religion and was often considered to be a heretic because he created an entire personal mythology about the creation of the world and had a unique vision that expanded far beyond the limits of the canon. For instance, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the English prophet called his illuminated method an infernal one, in which “heaven represents reason, or passive and consuming forms, and hell represents energy, or active and creative forms” (qtd. in Petersen 57). The infernal method was probably meant to have a catharsis effect, for Blake associated the apocalyptic vision of the whole world burning down and being stripped to its essence of infinity and holiness with the method in which his acids etched away the surface of the plate, leaving behind only lines in relief that were spiritually pure and true.

The whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt.... But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid. If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern. (Blake, *A Critical* 14)

Hence, albeit this method may be considered infernal from a traditionally religious perspective, it was holy for Blake who understood it

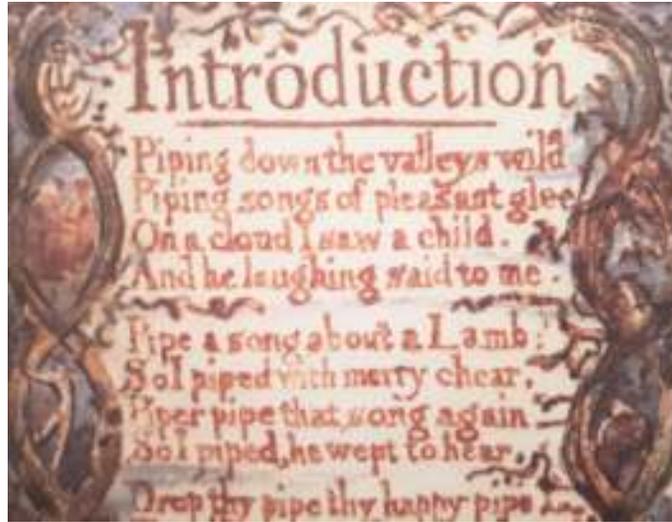


Figure 2. Close-up of William Blake's poem "Introduction"

as a mission to make people realize that the truth is beyond what is considered physically perceivable and to help free their power of imagination by cleansing their apprehension of the world. The melting together of image and text makes the illuminations an integral part of the work that allows the reader to acquire an understanding and construct an interpretation of the text by means of his or her own associations. The intricate designs and adorning of the poem "Introduction" [Figure 2] from the volume *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are made up of intertwined, vine-like plants with miniature scenes in every loop, that create a frame for the poem. Next to a river, climbing up the vertical plant, one can observe the figure of men and women, young and old and perhaps most remarkably a man whose posture resembles that of Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* or Blake's *Glad Day*, signifying freedom and bliss, love, affection and joyfulness for getting across the message of God (the Lamb). The poem "The Lamb" depicts a similar scenery of the river and the circular vegetative outline that do not interfere with the letters, but seem to offer a protective space for the naked young child who stands amongst the lambs (zoomorphic doubles of God). If in the Chi-Rho page of the *Book of Kells* there was an example of the cat and mice living

harmoniously together, Blake shows that, in the world of Innocence, the lamb and the tiger are not enemies. Despite the fact that in the text of “The Tiger,” part of the same volume, the speaker marvels at the animal’s fearfulness and deadly terror, the illustration portrays a creature that is not ferocious at all, not attacking, not rampant, not showing its fangs, but peaceful and content, in connection perhaps with the line “Did he smile his work to see?/ Did he who made the Lamb make thee” (Blake, *A Critical* 272). By creating a visual story that may go against the text of the poem, the poet-painter ensures that the visual and the literary are analyzed together as a unit, just as the lamb and the tiger are united by the same creator, having been made by the same “immortal hand or eye” (272) of God.

Half-printed, half-painted, the pieces of artwork dubbed illuminated books would each be unique and stand against what their author considered a denigration of art into mass commodity during the industrial revolution (“William Blake”). The coupling of mass production with the process of secularization is clearly expressed by Walter Benjamin in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” According to the author, the essence of art, its most sensitive core, lies in its authenticity and thus in its “presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (2). However, when faced with mechanical reproduction, the aura of the work withers and, along with it, its dependence on the ritual is destroyed and replaced by a reliance on politics (5). In this sense, the aura of Blake’s spiritual poems would be maintained by their author’s focus on each piece’s individuality, which marked a clear stance against what the bard deemed to be the dark, satanic mills of industrialized England. Although multiple versions of a book were printed with the use of the same plates (and thus the same page pattern), the colors always differed and the poet-printer tended to add distinct elements directly on paper, while also changing the order of pages from one book to another, so that no two identical volumes would ever be created.¹³

For example, the existing copies of the poem “The Little Boy Lost” from the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are all different from one another, not only in terms of colors, but also in terms of the features of the

young human figure visually represented therein. Sometimes the child seems to be a little girl, not a boy, sometimes she has a hat, other times a black aura or long hair; sometimes the background is undistinguishable, other times one can clearly see the outline of a tree behind her, which might influence the reader into making associations with the tree's spiritual symbolism. In addition, the source of light on the left side of the image, which might be the vapor that the text mentions, is sometimes very dim, making the child seem like he or she is driving it away, while in other instances it is very strong, giving the impression that the young figure is drawn to, almost hypnotized by it. Even though the image seems to be separated from the text in the upper part of the page, the artistic representation of six angels enter the space of the text and create a frame for it, seemingly supporting the weight of the block of letters. In this case, the ensemble of images and words brings forth the spiritual nature of the theme of the child seeking his father. The indeterminacy of meaning is also evident in the mirror poem¹⁴ of "The Little Boy Lost," namely "The Little Boy Found." Here too, there is a clear difference between the known copies of the poem, for if the adult figure holding the child's name seems to have male features such as a beard (and can thus be interpreted as God, the father sought after in the previous poem), in others the figure resembles a woman (perhaps the child's mother reunited with him or perhaps Virgin Mary when a halo appears). These visual changes add a different layer of interpretation to the poem, as the gender fluidity of the divine figure implies an androgynous representation of God that is not suggested by the text.

Adapting the principle of ImageText¹⁵ to the twentieth century and understanding, perhaps, the fact that "images are a way of writing" (Campbell 20), graphic novels make use of them in order to tackle much more complex and profound themes than their older siblings: comic books,¹⁶ and approach themes that take on the complexity of novels meant for a mature audience (albeit not necessarily religious or spiritual) and represent them by means of a visual style that combines text and illustrations. Many critics, among whom, Robert Petersen, believe that the modern art of graphic narratives started with Blake, a figure that can be considered a precursor or forefather of the genre of the graphic novel,

since he was so keen on showing that the “character and style of the words composed an organic whole with the pictures” (Petersen 57).

The first work to have been assigned the name of ‘graphic novel’ by its author in 1978 and consequently revolutionize the world of comics by popularizing this term was called *A Contract with God*, written and illustrated by American columnist Eisner. One of the most striking visual characteristics that distinguishes this graphic novel from most of today’s books is the fact that the narrative and the illustrations are not always separated by means of boxes, bubbles or panels, leading to an observer’s coherent experience of the blend between the two media (even more so when the text itself becomes an illustration). Yet, by appealing exclusively to the printing press for the multiplication of these novels, the immediateness and the direct connection that both medieval monks and Blake created in relation to each individual work is lost and each work becomes just a copy among many, neither luxurious, nor exclusive. The imperfect nature and unreproducible character of manuscripts and of Blakean illuminated works were part of the creative process that ensured unique products infused with personal touches. If we consider Benjamin’s argument, the spiritual or ritualistic aura of the graphic novel is lost in the process of secularization and mass production; hence the authority of its authenticity is minimalized.

The concept of remediation, defined by Jay David Bolter as a process that “occurs when a new medium pays homage to an older medium, borrowing and imitating features of it, and yet also stands in opposition to it, attempting to improve on it” (qtd. in Edgar), is useful in understanding the shift from illuminated printing to the art of the graphic novel. Thus, it is only natural that in the process of transition some elements may be lost along the way. The question is whether those characteristics were essential or dispensable to the first medium. In this sense, the most abrupt transformation of the text-image fusion in a published book had to do with the spiritual foundation of illumination and its subsequent secularization into graphic art. Perhaps the distancing from God and the need to render His words through verbal and visual unity is mirrored in the theme of the short story¹⁷ that gives the name of Eisner’s graphic novel *A Contract with God*. The title alludes to Israel’s covenant

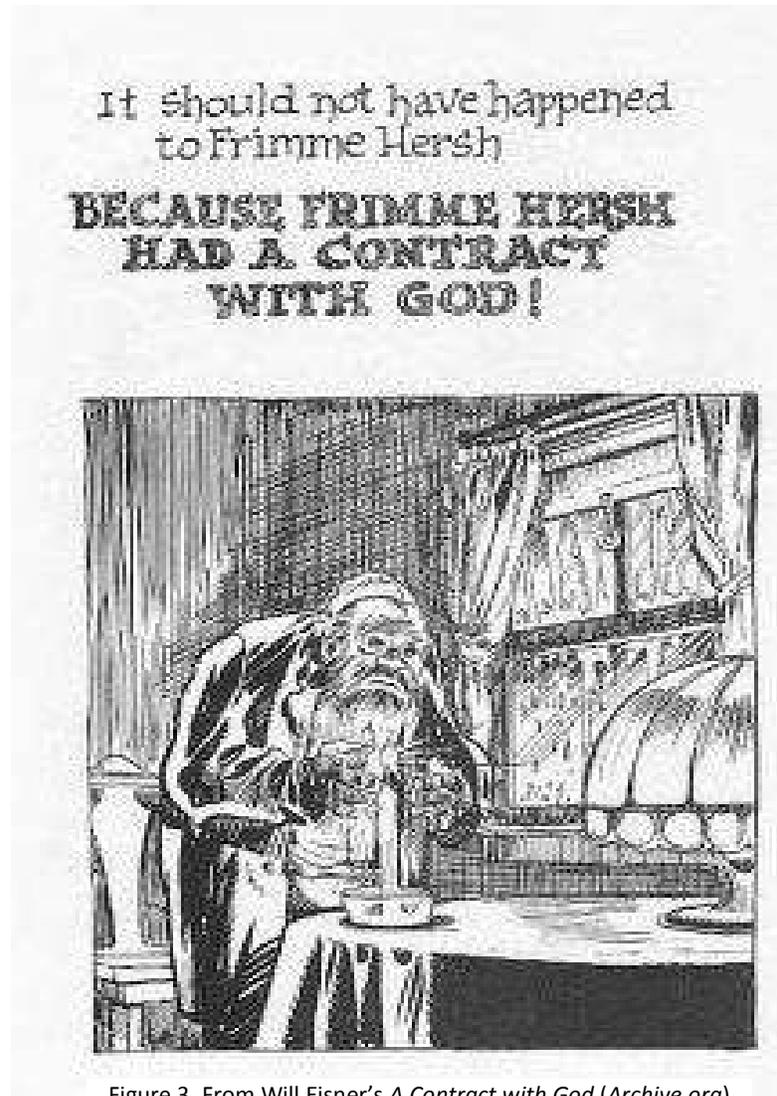


Figure 3. From Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (Archive.org)

with Yahweh: “Israel, normatively speaking, was understood to have a mutually binding contractual relationship with their god, governed by clearly defined rules and regulations” (Clark) and established at Sinai. The main character, Frimme Hersh, writes his own contract with God in order to make sure that his good deeds are rewarded. However, when his

adopted only daughter dies,¹⁸ he feels God has broken the contract, and he has no wish to keep his side of the deal by abiding by God's laws [Figure 3].

The disillusionment with God in this case can be a metaphor for the secularization of modern society and its art forms and particularly for the loss of the religious or spiritual foundation of the intermingling of the verbal and the visual. This attitude is famously theorized by what Max Weber calls the disenchantment of the world when he discusses the fact that contemporary society no longer values mystical life and turns instead to the importance of "rationalization and intellectualization" (qtd. in Shull 61) as main approaches to a secularized apprehension of reality. Moreover, "as Weber suggests, the retreat of magic in this age has had an impact on art, as it has now become its own sphere with its own set of values" (Shull 62). Thus, religion and superstition are stripped of their power to enchant society, as their sway has been eroded by enlightened rationality ("Disenchantment"). This attitude is evident in the graphic novel breaking the contract with God, and making use of the initially holy, religious melding of words and illustrations. The topics diversify accordingly and vary from the historical to the autobiographical to purely fictional, proving that more often than not, if there is something "reminiscent of religious mythologies ... [it is the] themes of good versus evil" (Stanley 83) that are prevalent in graphic novels nowadays, and if there is something reminiscent of illuminations, it can be only the vivid colors used in the illustrations and the flicker of the readers' imagination.

One of the best-known and most celebrated graphic novelists of our time, Moore, has not shied away from showing his appreciation of the influential artist Blake. More specifically, the successful American

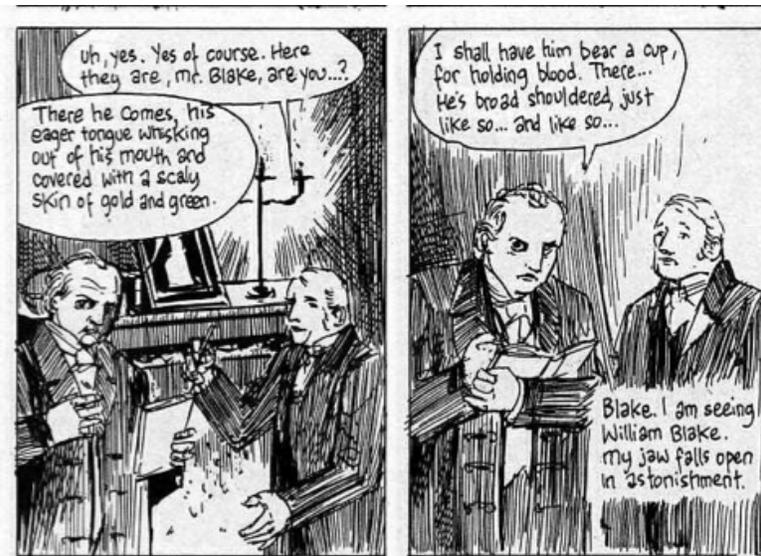


Figure 4. From Alan Moore's *From Hell*
(*TheHumanDivine.org*)

author's graphic novels *From Hell* and *Watchmen*¹⁹ seem to attract the most attention to Blake's impact on this relatively new genre that relies on the concept of sequential art. Yet, probably the most noticeable visual difference between Blake's works or even between Eisner's novel and Moore's graphic works is that, in the latter, the reader's eyes are directed on a specific path from left to right by means of the ever-present panels that mark the direction on which the viewer should be focused, instead of encouraging a back and forth movement to give added significance to the text. In this sense, the graphic novel follows the tradition of seventeenth-century caricatures and nineteenth-century serialized newspaper comic strips, albeit for the first time they are presented in the shape of a book.

As most western graphic novels nowadays, Moore's panels are created to be read from left to right, without offering the reader the freedom to choose which image relates to what piece of writing and in what way. Furthermore, while both medieval Christian scribes and Blake succeeded in "keeping word and image integrated" (Viscomi), graphic novels clearly delineate the border between the two, always separating them by means of narrative boxes or bubbles, "facilitate[ing] a binary relationship between the text and the image, where one aspect is always privileged at the expense of the other" (Ditto). It is true that the interaction of the two media is fundamental for the experience of graphic novels, and there is no official separation of them as different disciplines, yet on the page, images and words are no longer truly blended but seem to be always neatly arranged in separate boxes. Also, some critics have accused the graphic novel of limiting instead of expanding the reader's power of imagination, because they offer ready-made, mimetic images that have a clear, direct correspondence to the text. At the same time, the defenders of this genre assert that while "each comic panel is a moment frozen in time, your mind connects the dots" (Campbell 21), so the reader is the one who ultimately enriches the story with his or her own active creative input.



Figure 5. From Allan Moore's *The Watchmen* (Aminoapps.com)

Both *From Hell* and *Watchmen* pay direct homage directly to Blake, perhaps more so than to his illuminated printing method, albeit in different ways: the former with the help of a character, the latter by making use of a concept. In *From Hell*, the story revolves around the serial killer Jack the Ripper, whose identity is revealed to be Sir William Withey Gull, the royal physician of Queen Victoria. He is employed by the queen and his masonic peers to eliminate the prostitute acquaintances of Annie Crook, the mother of Prince Edward's illegitimate child, in order to protect the prince's reputation (Whittaker 201). Gull considers himself to be guided by Blake, but misinterprets the poet and manipulates his quotes to legitimize his belief that men have the right to dominate women. In one of his visions, the character travels to Blake's time [Figure 4] and understands that the latter's painting *Ghost of a Flea*²⁰ is a portrait of him as "the lowliest of demons, the spectre envisaged by Blake who foolishly assumed that Blake spoke with his voice" (Whittaker 203). The English bard's concept of symmetry is rendered in chapter five of Moore's *Watchmen* entitled "Fearful Symmetry," a phrase borrowed from Blake's poem "The Tiger," announced through the image of the two reflected letters 'R' on the cover and quoted at the end of the chapter. In this case, the panels are aligned symmetrically and the pages themselves seem to reflect one another, with the center serving as a mirror: "page 1 reflects page 28, page 2 reflects page 27, and so forth: the two page spread on pages 14-15 is where the mirror lies. Each page is a reflection of both layout and content" (Whitson, "Panelling"). However, the whole foundation of Blake's concept of symmetry was its potential to reveal the infinite holiness of the world, yet in Moore's graphic novel symmetry lacks this divine aspect, maintaining only a physical form.

By way of conclusion, the image-text pairing and blending in the shape of a book has undergone significant transformations throughout the ages, as it has been remediated to adapt to the *Zeitgeist* of each of the three representative examples discussed in this paper: from a predominantly religious medieval period that produced precious and beautifully adorned illuminated manuscripts such as the *Book of Kells*, to the transition towards industrialization that allowed Blake to create a mixed method of printing and painting, to the fully secularized genre of

the graphic novel that broke its “contract with God” and went against its very origin in order to address a modern, disenchanted society. If the double meaning of illumination along with its luxurious, unique result was revived in Blake’s time in the shape of one-of-a-kind limited editions intended to enlighten not just the beautifully colored pages but also the reader’s perception of the world’s divinity (although in a non-dogmatic manner), the graphic novel is illuminated through its coloring and perhaps through the stimulation of the reader’s imagination which is faced with matching two different media in order to create a story. However, because the graphic novel is mass-produced and multiple exact copies of the same product are created, it is devoid of the author’s personal touches and the spiritual message embedded in the individuality of each piece of art. The divinely inspired and embellished words and images, carefully written or engraved and painted by hand on each page, are now typed blocks, distant from their creator(s) and no longer carry with them a holy mission, converting the illuminated inspiration (in the etymological sense of filled with spirit) into graphic art.

Although certain graphic novelists, such as Moore, overtly express their works’ connection to Blake by means of thematic or conceptual homage, perhaps the essential reminder of the graphic novels’ ancestors lies in the interdependency of image and text to form a complete story of good versus evil. Yet, even the interaction between the two media has changed. A very close, direct connection – in which images were text and vice versa, visual figures were enclosed within letters, formed them or interacted with them – gave way to Blake’s partial blending of image and words that nonetheless kept them integrated. Two hundred years later, in the shape of graphic novels, the relationship between the visual and the literary eventually changed into a clear separation through the use of boxes and bubbles. Furthermore, the stimulation of imagination and indeterminacy of meaning that are also essential parts of the verbal-visual unity are challenged in the case of graphic novels, for the panels offer the reader a clear path to follow and the mimetic illustrations instruct him or her on the associations that should be made. However, since illustrations cannot be empty of meaning, their direct relation to a text brings about mutual molding into a different medium of expression that creates not just

a reading or a viewing experience, but a more profound artistic and emotional connection to the respective work, which remains the main aspect that legitimizes the graphic novel as a modern descendent of medieval illuminated manuscripts and Blake's illuminated volumes.

Notes:

¹ This is Stephen Behrendt's coinage for the intersection of image and text to form a new medium of expression.

² The word 'manuscript' (Lat. *manus, scriber*) means "written by hand," while "illuminate" (Lat. *illuminare*) stands for the phrase "to light up" ("Creating Contemporary Illuminated").

³ Although the intermingling of text and image was initially aimed at enriching one's religious experience, during the fifteenth century there was an increased demand in secular decorated manuscripts, and Renaissance illuminators started producing secular works. Consequently, humanistic texts (textbooks, chronicles of history, literary works, etc.) would be sold in open markets all throughout Europe ("Brief History").

⁴ The illustrations were also of aid to the illiterate lay people, who could thus gain access to the book (Jones).

⁵ The Books of Hours were private, smaller, vividly illuminated books of prayer, very popular in the middle ages among the European elite. They were based on the monastic cycle that divided the day into eight parts, or "hours" and allotted an exercise of devotion to each segment ("About Medieval"). One of the most famous examples is the *Très Riches Heures of Jean, duc de Berry*.

⁶ A religious volume comprised of the one hundred and fifty psalms of the Old Testament, followed by various prayers, meant for the use of both monks and lay people ("Luttrell").

⁷ The Psalter of Sir Geoffrey Luttrell (patron), produced in the early 1300s, is famous not only for the beautifully executed illuminations, but also for portraying daily life scenes of Medieval England: "a menagerie of weird and wonderful grotesques populates its margins – some the stuff of nightmares, others acceptable household pets, others overt parodies of society and politics" ("The Luttrell Psalter").

⁸ The style used was Insular Majuscule, which meant that all letters were essentially the same height ("Book of Kells").

⁹ The book was stolen in the eleventh century and it appears that its gold cover and a few leaves were removed and the folios were all trimmed.

¹⁰ Francoise Henry holds that there must have been three scribes who were also illuminators, but other scholars of the *Book of Kells* cannot agree on whether there were one, two, three or even four people involved in the process ("Book of Kells").

¹¹ The quote is taken from *King James Bible Online*.

¹² Some of Blake's most famous illuminated books include the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), the poetry volume *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1794) and the prophetic books *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *America a Prophecy* (1793) and *Europe a Prophecy* (1794).

¹³ Stephen Leo Carr maintains that the "radical variability" that Blake purposefully puts forth by means of his method of producing books "reveals the ultimate impossibility of determining some underlying authoritative structure" (186).

¹⁴ As the title suggests, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* offers poems that are symmetrical not just in the size of the letters (as seen in the majuscule insular style), but also by the fact that each of them seems to correspond to another poem in the same volume, thus giving the impression of interdependent contraries situated in divine symmetry.

¹⁵ The father of this concept, W.J.T. Michell, maintains that "the ImageText emerges in a bewildering haze of interaction, transformation and mutation" (qtd. in Whitson, "Introduction") of the two media.

¹⁶ Generally speaking, graphic novels have a superior production quality and are considered to be independent publications.

¹⁷ Eisner's *A Contract with God* is a graphic novel made up of four stand-alone stories: "A Contract with God," "The Street Singer," "The Super" and "Cookalein."

¹⁸ After the novel was published, Eisner admitted that his disillusionment with God at the loss of his own daughter to leukemia was inspirational for this story: "I exorcised my rage at a deity that I believed violated my faith and deprived my lovely 16-year-old child of her life at the very flowering of it" (qtd. in Schumacher 197).

¹⁹ *Watchmen* remains the only graphic novel to win a Hugo Award and is also the only graphic novel to appear on *Time* magazine's 2005 list of "the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to the present" ("Watchmen").

²⁰ In one of his visions, Blake saw that the soul of a fly was that of a murderous man, which is why he depicted it as a much enlarged monstrous figure.

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