



VISIONARY: William Blake's work has inspired musicians, authors, and even television advertisers.

ART & LITERATURE

An 'Immortal Hand'

Romantic-era poet William Blake has left fingerprints all over contemporary pop culture.

By Jeanette Colby

Poet and artist William Blake created some of the most indelible work of the Romantic era. But for more than two centuries, his works posed a technical challenge. Literary critics claimed Blake's writing, and art historians, his illustrations—with neither camp able to do justice to the full body of his work.

Two decades ago, the William Blake Archive—sponsored by the University with the Library of Congress and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—set out to take advantage of the possibilities of digital media. For the first time, the archive fully brought together Blake's writings and illustrations, as he had originally produced them. The archive—coedited by Morris Eaves, a professor of English and the Richard L. Turner Professor of Humanities at Rochester—now holds almost 7,000 images from 45 of the world's research libraries and museums, and a transformative redesign, launched in December, makes the site more accessible than ever before. The redesigned archive was recently nominated for an international Digital Humanities Award, in the category of Best Digital Humanities Tool. It complements the leading academic journal for Blake studies, *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, which is also coedited by Eaves and marks the 50th anniversary of its founding this year.

But you don't need to consult the archive or the journal to feel Blake's influence, which pervades popular culture through music, literature, film, and television. **R**

Visit the William Blake Archive at Blakearchive.org.



English heavy metal singer Bruce Dickinson, lead singer of Iron Maiden, released a solo album, *The Chemical Wedding*, in 1998. Inspired by Blake, the recording features songs such as "The Book of Thel" and "The Gates of Urizen."

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds recorded "A Weeping Song," in response to Blake's poem "Laughing Song," for their 1990 album, *The Good Son*.



The 1981 movie *Chariots of Fire* took its name from a line in Blake's "Jerusalem," and Sir Hubert Parry's musical setting of the poem played in its final scene. Parry's work has been featured in many other films, too, including *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976).



"My Blakean Year" was written and recorded by Patti Smith in tribute to the poet, part of her 2004 album, *Trampin'*.



Film & Television



In the 1982 science fiction movie *Blade Runner*, protagonist Roy Batty recites a variation of a verse from Blake's *America a Prophecy*.



Actor Kit Harrington recites Blake's most famous poem, "The Tyger," in a recent television ad for a car made by the auto company Infiniti.

Music

The band U2 released the album *Songs of Innocence* in 2014. The group is expected to release a follow-up album, *Songs of Experience*, this year.



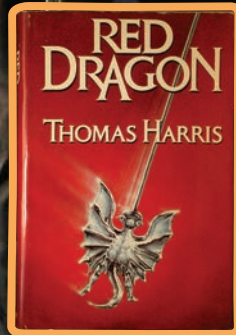
The band the Doors took its name from a phrase in Blake's 1970 illuminated book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite." Their debut album includes the song "End of the Night," inspired by Blake's poem "Auguries of Innocence": "Some are Born to sweet delight / Some are Born to Endless Night."

Bob Dylan collaborated with Allen Ginsberg in 1971 to record two Blake poems as songs: "Nurse's Song" and "A Dream."

Allen Ginsberg also recorded the album *Songs of Innocence and Experience* "by William Blake, tuned by Allen Ginsberg," released in 1970.

In Salman Rushdie's 1988 novel, *The Satanic Verses*, characters discuss *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

Blake's painting *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun* and his poem "Auguries of Innocence" both play a prominent role in the 1981 novel *Red Dragon* by Thomas Harris, which introduced the character Hannibal Lecter, best known from Harris's sequel, *The Silence of the Lambs*.



Literature

Like the Doors, Aldous Huxley borrowed Blake's phrase for his 1954 book, *The Doors of Perception*, a collection of essays about his experiences with the drug mescaline.

In 1916, Sir Hubert Parry set to music Blake's short poem "Jerusalem"—from the preface to his epic poem "Milton," composed between 1804 and 1811—and the piece was quickly embraced by a war-weary England. On the centenary of Blake's death in 1927, some called for its adoption as the country's national anthem.

Johnny Depp plays a character named William Blake in the 1995 movie *Dead Man*, which features lines from "Auguries of Innocence," *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and his unfinished poem, "The Everlasting Gospel," as well as Blakean themes and symbols.

Children's author Maurice Sendak, most famous for his 1963 picture book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, frequently acknowledged Blake's influence on his work. He was also a significant Blake collector.