

Public Abstract

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Title:Monuments of Human Antiquity: William Blake's *Milton, a Poem* as a Topographical Survey of Human Creativity

Much has been written about the painter, poet, and visionary William Blake, but explorations of the influences on his work have been limited for the most part to certain privileged spheres. Surprisingly little has been written on his interactions with antiquarian culture and landscape gardening by comparison to other spheres such as religion, politics, mythology, philosophy, poetry and painting. This project seeks to open the doors to a more inclusive study of Blake's work, specifically by looking at his short epic *Milton, a Poem* in comparison to and in light of various works from the eighteenth century. Blake's epic is examined first in comparison to William Stukeley's guidebooks to the megalithic ruins at Stonehenge and Avebury. Then the study moves on to the Society of Antiquaries' print series *Vetusta Monumenta* and to treatises on English landscape gardening. These comparisons make Blake's theory of art as a cooperative process more starkly evident and show that Blake was actively engaging with and reacting to a wide array of cultural phenomena. This project works towards a broader view of Blake studies, less driven by canonical sources and more engaged in the historical/cultural situation in which Blake worked.