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## *Unwinding*

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**Rob Conkie**

*Unwinding*

Abstract:

Here's my iteration of the Laocoön – shall we say? – meme. Does it begin with the sculpture described by Pliny the Elder and literally unearthed in a Roman vineyard in 1506? Or with the second book of Virgil's *Aeneid*? An eighteenth and nineteenth century touchstone for art/scholarship: I copy (do I copy?) Blake's engraving – image and text – as he had copied (no, not copied) a London-bound copy of the Rome-based "original". Poem > sculpture > painting > art theory > reproduction > iPad Pro Procreate remediation.

Biographical note:

Rob Conkie, for the most part, works on Shakespeare in performance. He's the author of several books, *Writing performative Shakespeares: New forms for performance criticism* (2016) among them. He is currently preoccupied with the new form of image/texts, especially as they might remediate live theatrical performance.

Keywords:

Laocoön, image/text, intermediality, William Blake

In his peasant engravings, Durer invents nothing less than a new iconographic mode of art: the inverse citation (Muller 2011: 4).

IF YOU TEACH ADAPTATION OR INTERMEDIALITY, YOU MUST CONSIDER THE LAOCOON.

the spatiality of writing ... sheer textual plenitude (Wright: 2, 6).

With a double grip round his waist and his neck, the scaly creatures Embrace him

gives shape to his pieces of text, by bending them in arcs, horseshoes, trapeziums, and even a question mark (Wright: 15).

Virgil's Laocoon... screams indubitably (Mehigan 2005: np).

W.J.T. Mitchell, explicating image-text relations within his overall *Picture Theory*, writes that the poet-painter William Blake's illuminated books seem absolutely to demand a reader capable of moving between verbal and visual literacy (1994: 89).

Winckelmann argued for a moral reading (Sjoholm: 2013:23).

THIS RE-PRESENTATION IS NOT FROM AN ILLUMINATED BOOK. IT IS OF BLAKE'S [Laocoon] is a work to be preferred to all that the arts in painting and sculpture have produced. Out of one block of stone, the consummate artists, Hagesandos, Polydorus, and Athenodoros of Rhodes made, after careful planning, Laocoon, his sons, and the snakes marvellously entwined about them.

conventions and bewildering the restless gaze with a pressing mob of words, crammed in wherever Blake could make room, even to the point of having to reduce the size of his script when necessary, without any regard for harmonious composition or ease of reading.

LIKE AN ESSAY

(McCarthy 2007: 10)

a glare and blaze of blood-shot eyes, Tongues flickering like flame from their mouths, and the mouths hissing,

TWO-DIMENSIONAL REMEDIATION OF THE LAOCOON SCULPTURE.

... seems intentionally to provoke the viewer, defying generic

the visual shape of these texts, like rays vibrating from the figures, requires physical engagement with the artifact (Essick & Viscomi 1991-95: 231).

BLAKE

C. 1820  
LAOCOON ENGRAVING  
'JAHWEH & HIS TWO  
SONS, SATAN & ADAM'

All the while, his appalling cries go up to heaven - a bellowing, such as you hear when a wounded bull escapes from The altar

shatters sequence as well as completion: it defies the reader to read all of the words and be sure that all are read...

not so much undermining or deconstructing Lessing's distinction between painting and poetry (Wright: 15) as he is demonstrating the possibility of transcending their opposition (McCarthy: 59).

I, NO POET-PAINTER, COULD NEVER DEMAND ANYTHING OF YOU, THE VIEWER-READER: BUT I INVITE YOU TO ATTEND TO THE FLUID, SOMETIMES SEEMINGLY IMPROVISATIONAL, CHOREOGRAPHY OF THE VISUAL-VERBAL DANCE.

HERE UNWINDS A POTTED HISTORY OF THE LAOCOON

C. 77-79 AD PLINY NATURALIS HISTORIA BOOK 36, CH. 4

LITERALLY UNRECOVERED, 1906 ATTEMPTS AT "RESTORATION" CULMINATING IN 1932

MONTORSOLI

1773 FINDING THE LAOCOON SCULPTURE IN THE ROMAN PALACE OF THE PAPES

PAINTINGS

1764 A HISTORY OF ANCIENT ART WINCKELMANN NOBLE SIMPLICITY AND SILENT GRANDEUR

29-19 BC AENEID BOOK II 199-227

VIRGIL

each snake knotted itself round the body of one of Laocoon's sons

1514 PEASANT COUPLE DANCING DÜRER

They fastened upon Laocoon

C. 1520-1550? LAOCOON [APES] CARICATURE TITIAN

IN SUDOKU FORM

LESSING

the

Laocoon

the

visual

shape

of

these

texts,

like

rays

vibrat-

ing

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figures,

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engage-

Drawn & Engraved by William Blake

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