

from Blake's letters

*To George Cumberland, Dec 1796*

"I have lately had some pricks of conscience on account of not acknowledging your **friendship** to me immediately on the rec[eip]t of your beautiful book." (E 700)

from Blake's Letters

*To George Cumberland, July 1800*

"Excuse I intreat you my not returning Thanks at the proper moment for your kind present. No perswasion could make my stupid head believe that it was proper for me to trouble you with a letter of meer Compliment and Expression of thanks. . . (E 706)

from Blake's Letters

*To George Cumberland, July 1800*

"Excuse I intreat you my not returning Thanks **at the proper moment** for your kind present. No perswasion could make my stupid head believe that it was proper for me **to trouble you** with a letter of **meer** Compliment and Expression of thanks. . . (E 706)

"[Gifts] are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact **obligatory** and interested.

Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. 1923. Trans. Ian Cunnison. New York: Norton, 1967.

According to Mauss, there are three obligations:

1. to give
2. to receive
3. to give in return



from Blake's Letters

*To William Hayley, December 1804*

"I have omitted so long to thank you for your kind & admirable Present in hopes to send Proofs of my plates but can no longer wait for them but must express my own & my wife's high gratification in the perusal of your elegant & pathetic Poem."

from Blake's Letters

To William Hayley, December 1804

"I have omitted so long to thank you for your **kind & admirable Present** in hopes to send Proofs of my plates but **can no longer wait** for them but **must** express my own & my wife's high gratification in the perusal of your elegant & pathetic Poem."

from Blake's Notebooks

On H ----- the Pick thank

"I write the Rascal Thanks till he & I With Thanks & Compliments are quite drawn dry" (Blake, E 506, from Notebook).

## Gift Exchange



"The moment the gift, however generous it be, is infected with the slightest hint of **calculation**, the moment it takes account of knowledge or recognition, it falls within the ambit of an economy: it exchanges."

Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge, 2001.

## Blake and Gift Exchange

"I have tried to make friends by corporeal gifts, but have only Made enemies; I never made friends but by spiritual gifts, By severe contentions of friendship and the burning fire of thought."

(Blake's character Los in *Jerusalem* 4.91:15-17; E 251)

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(Blake's character Los in *Jerusalem* 4.91:15-17; E 251)

## Poison

*Gif* (German), *Vergif* (Dutch)

from Blake's Notebooks

"Was I angry with Hayley who usd me so ill  
Or can I be angry with Felphams old Mill  
Or angry with Flaxman or Cromek or Stothard  
Or poor Schiavonetti whom they to death  
bothred  
Or angry with Macklin or Boydel or Bowyer  
Because they did not say O what a Beau ye are  
**At a Friends Errors Anger shew  
Mirth at the Errors of a Foe**" (E 504)

Forgive

**For** = completely, exhaustively

**Give** = voluntary transfer without compensation

1. To give up resentment or claim to requital for [an insult]
2. To grant relief from payment of [a debt]

Forgiveness and Gift Exchange

"All Quarrels arise from Reasoning. . .  
To freeze Love & Innocence into the gold &  
silver of the Merchant  
Without Forgiveness of Sin Love is Itself  
Eternal Death"

(Los in *Jerusalem* 64:20, 23-24; E 215)

"The Little Vagabond" (Experience)



Copy C 1794



Copy L 1795



Copy R 1795

"The Little Vagabond" (Experience)

Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold,  
But the Ale-house is healthy & pleasant & warm;  
Besides I can tell where I am use'd well,  
Such usage in heaven will never do well,

But if at the Church they would give us some Ale.  
And a pleasant fire our souls to regale;  
We'd sing and we'd pray all the live-long day;  
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray,

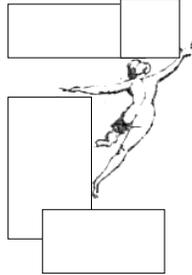
"The Little Vagabond" (Experience)

Then the Parson might preach & drink & sing,  
And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring:  
And modest dame Lurch. who is always at Church,  
Would not have bandy children nor fasting nor birch.

And God like a father rejoicing to see,  
His children as pleasant and happy as he:  
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil or the  
Barr[el]  
But kiss him & give him both drink and apparel.

## William Blake and Gift Exchange

He who binds to himself a joy  
Doth the winged life destroy  
But he who kisses the joy as it flies  
Lives in Eternity's sun rise  
-- William Blake



## Source of Illustrations

- electronic edition. *The William Blake Archive*. Ed. Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi. 2003. <http://www.blakearchive.org>