

Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Perspectives

ALLEN GINSBERG

[My Vision of Blake][†]

* * * [A]nd suddenly I realized that the poem was talking about *me*. "Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time, / Who countest the steps of the Sun; / Seeking that sweet golden clime, / Where the traveller's journey is done." Now, I began understanding it, the poem while looking at it, and suddenly, simultaneously with understanding it, heard a very deep earthen grave voice in the room, which I immediately assumed, I didn't think twice, was Blake's voice; it wasn't any voice that I knew, though I had previously had a conception of a voice of rock, in a poem, some image like that—or maybe that came after this experience.

And my eye on the page, simultaneously the auditory hallucination, or whatever terminology here used, the apparitional voice, in the room, woke me further deep in my understanding of the poem, because the voice was so completely tender and beautifully . . . ancient. Like the voice of the Ancient of Days. But the peculiar quality of the voice was something unforgettable because it was like God had a human voice, with all the infinite tenderness and ancience and mortal gravity of a living Creator speaking to his son. "Where the youth pined away with desire, / And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow / Arise from their graves, and aspire / Where my Sun-flower wishes to go." Meaning that there *was* a *place*, there was a sweet golden clime, and the *sweet golden*, what was that . . . and simultaneous to the voice there was also an emotion, risen in my soul in response to the voice, and a sudden *visual* realization of the same awesome phenomena. That is to say, looking out at the window, through the window at the sky, suddenly it seemed that I saw into the depths of the universe, by looking

[†] From an interview by Thomas Clark, "The Art of Poetry VIII: Allen Ginsberg," *The Paris Review* 37 (1966), 13–55, excerpts from 36–40, 42–43, 44–45, 50–51. By permission of Regal Literary, Inc. as agent for *The Paris Review*. © 1966 by *The Paris Review*. Ginsberg's quotations from memory deviate from Blake's texts. Of distinguished writers who have admired or emulated Blake—among them D. G. Rossetti, A. C. Swinburne, W. B. Yeats, G. B. Shaw, James Joyce, Joyce Cary, Dylan Thomas, Theodore Roethlis, Kenneth Patchen, Philip Pullman and even T. S. Eliot (1920, rpt. in his *Selected Essays* [1932], 317–22, and in our 1979 edition)—only Ginsberg claims to have experienced Blake's presence directly. The poet Alicia Ostricker discusses Blake's influence on Ginsberg in Bertoff and Levitt's *William Blake and the Moderns* (1982) and on her own life and work in *The Romantics and Us* (1990), ed. Gene W. Ruoff. Ginsberg's liner notes to his Verre recording (1970) with Peter Orlovsky are reprinted as "To Young or Old Listeners: Setting Blake's *Songs* to Music, and a Commentary on the *Songs*, *Blake Newsletter* 4 (1971), 98–103; other notable settings of *Songs* may be found in Donald Fitch, *Blake Set to Music* (1989). (Our own favorites are Greg Brown [Red Label, 1986] and William Bolcom [Naxos, 2004]). For visual artists inspired by Blake, see dagger note on p. 514.

simply into the ancient sky. The sky suddenly seemed very *ancient*. And this was the very ancient place that he was talking about, the sweet golden clime, I suddenly realized that *this* existence was *it*! And, that I was born in order to experience up to this very moment that I was having this experience, to realize what this was all about—in other words that this was the moment that I was born for. This initiation. Or this vision or this consciousness, of being alive unto myself, alive myself unto the Creator. As the son of the Creator—who loved me, I realized, or who responded to my desire, say. It was the same desire both ways.

Anyway my first thought was this was what I was born for, and second thought, never forget—never forget, never remig, never deny. Never deny the voice—no, never *forget* it, don't get lost mentally wandering in other spirit worlds or American or job worlds or advertising worlds or war worlds or earth worlds. But the spirit of the universe was what I was born to realize. What I was speaking about visually was, immediately, that the cornices in the old tenement building in Harlem across the back yard court had been carved very finely in 1890 or 1910. And were like the solidification of a great deal of intelligence and care and love also. So that I began noticing in every corner where I looked evidences of a living hand, even in the bricks, in the arrangement of each brick. Some hand placed them there—that some hand had placed the whole universe in front of me. That some hand had placed the sky. No, that's exaggerating—not that some hand had placed the sky but that the sky was the living blue hand itself. Or that God was in front of my eyes—existence itself was God. Well the formulations are like that—I didn't formulate it in exactly those terms, what I was seeing was a visionary thing, it was a lightness in my body . . . my body suddenly felt *light*, and a sense of cosmic consciousness, vibrations, understanding, awe, and wonder and surprise. And it was a sudden awakening into a totally deeper real universe than I'd been existing in. So, I'm trying to avoid generalizations about that sudden deeper real universe and keep it strictly to observations of phenomenal data, or a voice with a certain sound, the appearance of cornices, the appearance of the sky say, of the great blue hand, the living hand—to keep to images.

But anyway—the same . . . *petite sensation* recurred several minutes later, with the same voice, while reading the poem *The Sick Rose*. This time it was a slightly different sense-depth-mystic impression. Because *The Sick Rose*—you know I can't interpret the poem now, but it had a meaning—I mean I can interpret it on a verbal level, the sick rose is my self, or self, or the living body, sick because the mind, which is the worm "that flies in the night, in the howling storm," or Urizen, reason; Blake's character might be the one that's entered the body and is destroying it, or let us say death, the worm as being death, the natural process of death, some kind of mystical being of its own trying to come in and devour the body, the rose. Blake's drawing for it is complicated, it's a big drooping rose, drooping because it's dying, and there's a worm in it, and the worm is wrapped around a little sprite that's trying to get out of the mouth of the rose.

But anyway, I experienced *The Sick Rose*, with the voice of Blake reading it, as something that applied to the whole universe, like hearing the doom of the whole universe, and at the same time the inevitable beauty of doom. I can't remember now, except it was very beautiful and very awe-

some. But a little of it slightly scary, having to do with the knowledge of death—my death and also the death of being itself, and that was the great pain. So, like a prophecy, not only in human terms but a prophecy as if Blake had penetrated the very secret core of the *entire* universe and had come forth with some little magic formula statement in rhyme and rhythm that, if properly heard in the inner inner ear, would deliver you beyond the universe.

So then, the other poem that brought this on in the same day was *The Little Girl Lost*, where there was a repeated refrain,

Do father, mother, weep,
Where can Lyca sleep?

How can Lyca sleep
If her mother weep?

'If her heart does ache
Then let Lyca wake;
If my mother sleep,
Lyca shall not weep.'

It's that hypnotic thing—and I suddenly realized that Lyca was me, or Lyca was the self; father, mother seeking Lyca, was God seeking. Father, the Creator; and "If her heart does ache / Then let Lyca wake"—wake to what? *Wake* meaning wake to the same awareness I was just talking about—of existence in the entire universe. The total consciousness then, of the complete universe. Which is what Blake was talking about. In other words a breakthrough from ordinary habitual quotidian consciousness into consciousness that was really seeing all of heaven in a flower. Or what was it, eternity in a flower . . . heaven in a grain of sand. As I was seeing heaven in the cornice of the building. By heaven here I mean this imprint or concretization or living form, of an intelligent hand—the work of an intelligent hand, which still had the intelligence molded into it. The gargoyles on the Harlem cornices. What was interesting about the cornice was that there's cornices like that on every building, but I never noticed them before. And I never realized that they meant spiritual labor, to anyone—that somebody had labored to make a curve in a piece of tin—to make a cornucopia out of a piece of industrial tin. Not only that man, the workman, the artisan, but the architect had thought of it, the builder had paid for it, the smelter had *smelt* it, the miner had dug it up out of the earth, the earth had gone through eons preparing it.

* * * And God knows how many people made the moon. Or what spirits labored . . . to set fire to the sun. As Blake says, "When I look in the sun I don't see the rising sun I see a band of angels singing holy, holy, holy." Well his perception of the field of the sun is different from that of a man who just sees the sun sun, without any emotional relationship to it.

* * *

Then, I was walking around Columbia and I went in the Columbia bookstore and was reading Blake again, leafing over a book of Blake, I

think it was *The Human Abstract*: "Pity would be no more . . ." And suddenly it came over me in the bookstore again, and I was in the eternal place *once more*, and I looked around at everybody's faces, and I saw all these wild animals! Because there was a bookstore clerk there who I hadn't paid much attention to, he was just a familiar fixture in the bookstore scene and everybody went in the bookstore every day like me, because downstairs there was a café and upstairs there were all these clerks that we were all familiar with—this guy had a very long face, you know some people look like giraffes. So he looked kind of giraffish. He had a kind of a long face with a long nose. I don't know what kind of sex life he had, but he must have had something. But anyway I looked in his face and I suddenly saw like a great tormented soul—and he had just been somebody whom I'd regarded as perhaps a not particularly beautiful or sexy character, or lovely face, but you know someone familiar, and perhaps a pleading cousin in the universe. But all of a sudden I realized that *he* knew also, just like I knew. And that everybody in the bookstore knew, and that they were all hiding it! They all had the consciousness, it was like a great *unconscious* that was running between all of us that everybody *was* completely conscious, but that the fixed expressions that people have, the habitual expressions, the manners, the mode of talk, are all masks hiding this consciousness. Because almost at that moment it seemed that it would be too terrible if we communicated to each other on a level of total consciousness and awareness each of the other—like it would be too terrible—it would be the end of the bookstore, it would be the end of civ . . . not civilization, but in other words the position that everybody was in was *ridiculous*, everybody running around peddling books to each other. Here in the universe! Passing money over the counter, wrapping books in bags and guarding the door, you know, stealing books, and the people sitting up making accountings on the upper floor there, and people worrying about their exams walking through the bookstore, and all the millions of thoughts the people had you know, that I'm worrying about, whether they're going to get laid or whether anybody loves them, about their mothers dying of cancer or you know the complete death awareness that everybody has continuously with them all the time—all of a sudden revealed to me at once in the faces of the people, and they all looked like horrible grotesque masks, grotesque because *hiding* the knowledge from each other. Having a habitual conduct and forms to prescribe, forms to fulfill. Roles to play. But the main insight I had at that time was that everybody knew. Everybody knew completely everything. Knew completely everything in the terms which I was talking about.

* * * The twisted faces of all those people, the faces were twisted by rejection. And hatred of self, finally. The internalization of that rejection. And finally disbelief in that shining self. Disbelief in that infinite self. Partly because the particular . . . partly because the *awareness* that we all carry is too often painful, because the experience of rejection and lacklove and cold war—I mean the whole cold war is the imposition of a vast mental barrier on everybody, a vast anti-natural psyche. A hardening, a shutting off of the perception of desire and tenderness which everybody *knows* and which is the very structure of . . . the atom! Structure of the human body and

organism. That desire built in. Blocked. "Where the youth pined away with desire, the Virgin shrouded in snow." Or as Blake says, "On every face I see, I meet / marks of weakness, marks of woe." So what I was thinking in the bookstore was the marks of weakness, marks of woe. Which you can just look around and look at anybody's face right next to you now always—you can see it in the way the mouth is pursed, you can see it in the way the eyes blink, you can see it in the way the gaze is fixed down at the matches. It's the self-consciousness which is a substitute for communication with the outside. This consciousness pushed back into the self and thinking of how it will hold its face and eyes and hands in order to make a mask to hide the flow that is going on. Which it's aware of, which everybody is aware of really! So let's say, shyness. Fear. Fear of like total feeling, really, total being, is what it is.

So the problem then was, having attained realization, how to safely manifest it and communicate it. Of course there was the old Zen thing, when the sixth patriarch handed down the little symbolic oddments and ornaments and books and bowls, stained bowls too . . . when the *fifth* patriarch handed them down to the sixth patriarch he told him to hide them and don't tell anybody you're patriarch because it's dangerous, they'll kill you. So there was that immediate danger. It's taken me all these years to manifest it and work it out in a way that's materially communicable to people. Without scaring them or me. Also movements of history and breaking down the civilization. To break down everybody's masks and roles sufficiently so that everybody has to face the universe *and* the possibility of the sick rose coming true and the atom bomb. So it was an immediate Messianic thing. Which seems to be becoming more and more justified. And more and more reasonable in terms of the existence that we're living.

So. Next time it happened was about a week later walking along in the evening on a circular path around what's now I guess the garden or field in the middle of Columbia University, by the library. I started invoking the spirit, consciously trying to get another depth perception of cosmos. And suddenly it began occurring again, like a sort of breakthrough again, but this time—this was the last time in that period—it was the same depth of consciousness or the same cosmical awareness but suddenly it was not blissful at all but it was *frightening*. Some like real serpent-fear entering the sky. The sky was not a blue hand anymore but like a hand of death coming down on me—some really scary presence, it was almost as if I saw God again except God was the Devil. The consciousness itself was so vast, much more vast than any idea of it I'd had or any experience I'd had, that it was not even human any more—and was in a sense a threat, because I was going to die into that inhuman ultimately.

* * *

* * * There was a cycle that began with the Blake vision which ended on the train in Kyoto when I realized that to attain the depth of consciousness that I was seeking when I was talking about the Blake vision, that in order to attain it I had to cut myself off from the Blake vision and renounce it. Otherwise I'd be hung up on a memory of an experience. Which is not the actual awareness of now, now.

Seeking to drive their thirst away,
And keep them from the sheep.
But if they rush dreadful:
The angels most heedful,
Reieve each mild spirit,
New worlds to inherit.

30

And there the lions ruddy eyes,
Shall flow with tears of gold:
And plying the tender cries,
And walking round the fold:
Saying: wrath by his meekness
And by his health, sickness,
Is driven away,
From our immortal day.

40

And now beside thee bleating lamb,
I can lie down and sleep;⁴
Or think on him who bore thy name
Grazed after thee and weep.
For wash'd in lifes river,⁵
My bright mane for ever,
Shall shine like the gold,
As I guard o'er the fold.

45

Spring

22

Sound the Flute!
Now it's mute.
Birds delight
Day and Night.
Nightingale
In the dale
Lark in Sky
Merrily
Merrily Merrily to welcome in the Year

5

Little Boy
Full of joy.
Little Girl
Sweet and small,
Cock does crow
So do you.
Merry voice
Infant noise
Merrily Merrily to welcome in the Year

15

Little Lamb
Here I am,

20

Come and lick
My white neck.
Let me pull
Your soft Wool.
Let me kiss
Your soft face.
Merrily Merrily we welcome in the Year.

25

Nurse's Song

24

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And every thing else is still

Then come home my children, the sun is gone down
And the dews of night arise

5

Come come leave off play, and let us away
Till the morning appears in the skies
No no let us play, for it is yet day

And we cannot go to sleep

10

Besides in the sky, the little birds fly
And the hills are all covered with sheep

Well well go & play till the light fades away
And then go home to bed
The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh'd
And all the hills echoed.

15



Infant Joy

25

I have no name
I am but two days old⁶—

4. Isaiah prophesies that the lion and lamb shall lie down together (11:6) and predators shall graze (65:25).
5. Prophesied in Ezekiel 47:9, 12 and Revelation 22:1–2.

6. Usually infants were baptized and given their Christian names three or more days after birth. On this child's self-naming in the mother's imagination, see Stanley Gardner, *Blake's Innocence and Experience Retraced* (1986), and Thomas Dilworth, *English Language Notes* 38 (2000), 43–47. For the setting, see color plate 2.

NURSES Song

38

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And whispings are in the dale:
The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,
My face turns green and pale.

Then come home my children, the sun is gone down
And the dews of night arise
Your spring & your day, are wasted in play
And your winter and night in disguise.⁹

5



The SICK ROSE

39

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.¹

5

9. Three of the eight lines are repeated from the counterpart poem in *Imnocence*; the other five lines (and the design) reveal stark differences as implied by the body language of the boy's crossed forearms, the Nurse's bracketing of his head as she fusses with his hair, and the girl's absorption in her book.
1. Usually interpreted as corruption by a sexual aggressor (although in color plate 3 the female spirit emerging from the dying rose appears delighted). For a feminist counterview see Elizabeth Langland in *Critical Paths* (1987), ed. Miller, Bracher, and Ault, and for a political reading see Jon Mee, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22:1 (1998).

THE FLY.²

40

Little Fly
Thy summers play,
My thoughtless hand
Has brush'd away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

5

For I dance
And drink & sing:
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.³

10

If thought is life
And strength & breath;
And the want
Of thought is death;

15

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

20



2. In Blake's time *fly* referred also to the butterfly. The sequence of stanzas in Blake's two-column layout, with the fifth stanza centered below, is unambiguous in the stanza numbering of his draft (Notebook 101).
3. Cf. *King Lear* 4.1.36-37: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport." Grant, "Interpreting Blake's 'The Fly'" (1963; rpt. Blake, ed. Frye, 1966), notes the double enclosure formed by the nurse's arms and the dead tree.

early as 1795 he added a new poem, "To Tirzah," to *Experience*, a work that anticipates a major character and associated themes of much later epic-length poems.

In 1789, when Blake published *Songs of Innocence*, he was no thirty-two-year-old naïf who took childlike joy in a nursery world, nor did he become, when he published *Songs of Experience* separately in 1793, a thirty-six-year-old cynic obsessed with suffering and oppression. In the productive period of 1789–93 Blake also published *The Book of Thel*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *For Children: The Gates of Paradise*, and *America*. In these and later works he continued to explore themes related to the "contrary states." For example, the narrator of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* proclaims that "Without Contraries is no progression," and *Milton* and other poems distinguish between Contraries and Negations and between States and Individuals. Individuals are real and eternal; states are temporary conditions of error or illusion through which an individual may pass. In his own voice, Blake declared that "whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual" (p. 436 herein). In *Songs*, Blake left it up to the reader to weigh the claims of Innocence and Experience against each other and to arrive, perhaps, at a larger way of seeing the world, neither naively nor cynically, that encompasses both states.

Blake's contemporary reputation as a poet (as opposed to a graphic artist) rested almost entirely on *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Lamb (who had heard "The Tyger" recited orally) admired individual poems; B. H. Mallan, father of one of Blake's pupils, published a selection in a memoir (1806); Henry Crabb Robinson translated and published several in a German magazine (1811); a few were anthologized in Britain. For Robert F. Gleckner, *The Piper and the Bard* (1959); Hazard Adams, *William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems* (1963); D. G. Gillham, *Blake's Contrary States* (1966); Eban Bass, "Songs of Innocence and of Experience: The Thrust of Design" in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic* (1970), ed. Erdman and Grant; Zachary Leader, *Reading Blake's Songs* (1981); Heather Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment* (1983); Stanley Gardner, *Blake's Innocence and Experience Retraded* (1986); Harold Pagliaro, *Selfhood and Redemption in Blake's Songs* (1987); and Michael Phillips, *The Creation of the Songs from Manuscript Draft to Illuminated Printing* (2000). *William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1987), ed. Harold Bloom, assembles previously published essays. *Approaches to Teaching Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1989), ed. Robert F. Gleckner and Mark L. Greenberg, though in part factually outdated, remains of interest to students as well as teachers. There are even more articles on individual poems (some cited in the footnotes) than on the collection as a whole.

After 1818, in seven of the last eight printings of *Songs*, Blake arrived at a stable page sequence. A convenient way to explore shifts in meaning produced by his rearrangements of pages is to use the "next" and "previous" arrows of the online edition of *Songs* in the Blake Digital Text Project directed by Nelson Hilton at the University of Georgia (www.english.uga.edu/wblake/). The online William Blake Archive (www.blakearchive.org), ed. Morris Eaves, Robert Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, makes it possible to compare superb digital images of multiple copies on one screen, zoom in on details, and search for recurring visual motifs throughout Blake's illuminated oeuvre; the archive also provides transcriptions of the text and suggestions for further reading. An essential resource is Andrew Lincoln's generously annotated photographic facsimile edition of *Songs* Copy W, a late copy, volume 2 (1991) in the Blake Trust series; see also the beautiful hand-painted facsimiles in the older Blake Trust/Ithanon Press series, ed. Geoffrey Keynes: an early version of *Songs of Innocence* alone (1954, Copy B) and a late version of the combined *Songs* (1955, Copy Z), photographically reproduced by

Oxon Press, 1967; reprinted by Oxford University Press, 1971). From the same copies, Dover Press offers inexpensive reproductions of *Innocence* B (1971) and of the *Experience* portion of the combined *Songs* Z (1984). Images of Princeton University's Copy U, digitized by the University of Michigan, may be viewed online (catalog.princeton.edu); search on the book's title and click on the item dated 1794. Stanley Gardner, *The Tyger The Lamb and the Terrible Desert* (1998), reproduces Harvard University's Copy I and uncolored Copy b, printed by a friend after Blake's death.

It is easy to become overwhelmed by all these resources, especially if they lead to premature fretting over textual and pictorial minutiae. After all, Blake sold *Songs* one book at a time, to individuals, with no notion that anyone would someday compare copies image by image and line by line. Any single version of *Songs* offers more than enough to fill the mind with consideration of each illuminated poem, as it appears in any of its many possible contexts.

Our base text is Copy Z (1826 Library of Congress), closely compared with uncolored Copy b (posthumous) and with online Blake Archive facsimiles of Copies C (1794), AA (1826), and R (Blake's own copy, completed in 1795, touched up from time to time, and sold to his friend John Linnell in 1819). As noted in "Textual Technicalities," the erratic capitalization, spelling, and punctuation are Blake's, except for the occasional editorial period inserted to mark the end of a poem that lacks concluding punctuation.

SONGS OF INNOCENCE and OF EXPERIENCE*

Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul

SONGS OF INNOCENCE

1789

The Author & Printer W Blake

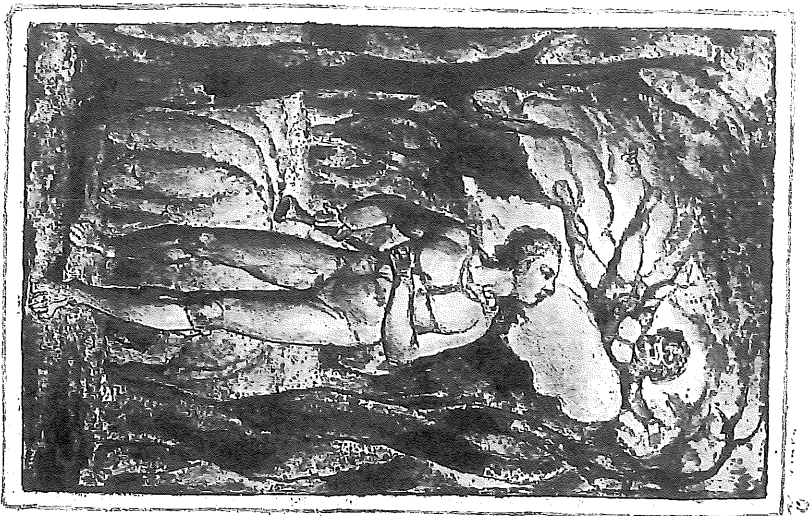
Introduction

Piping down the valleys wild
Piping songs of pleasant glee
On a cloud I saw a child.
And he laughing said to me.

Pipe a song about a Lamb;¹
So I piped with merry cheer,

* See color plate 1. This version of the title page (Princeton, Copy U), c.1818, is the only one in which the bird carries something in its beak, and it is one of the few in which the mouths of Adam and Eve are open, as if to protest their expulsion from Eden.

1. The cherubine Piper (see design), a traditional figure in pastoral idylls, is inspired to become a singer, then a writer, of happy songs with profound undertones. Many songs of the innocent state express Christian themes in a natural setting or in images drawn from nature, as a child might understand them, apart from the institution of the Church. The "song about a Lamb"—foreshadowing lambs or lamblike children in "The Lamb," "Night," "The Little Black Boy," "The Chimney Sweep," and "Holy Thursday"—calls to mind Jesus, Lamb of God (John 1:29, 1 Peter 1:19, Revelation 5:12), as the Passover lamb of Exodus 12:5, interpreted through Isaiah 53:7.

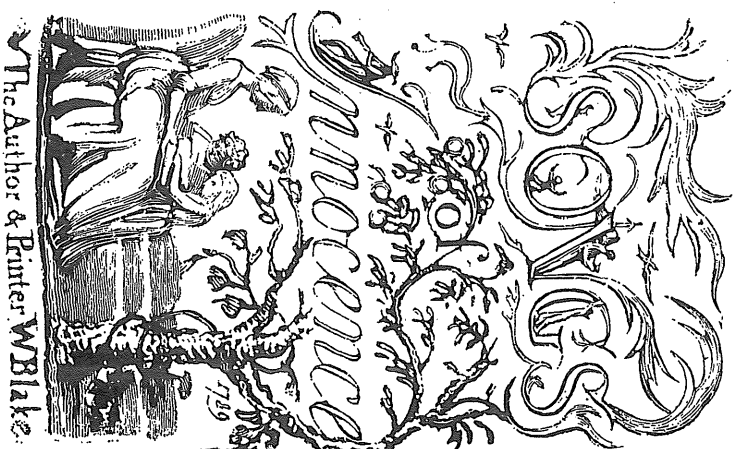


Piper pipe that song again—
So I piped, he wept to hear.

Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe,
Sing thy songs of happy cheer,
So I sung the same again—
While he wept with joy to hear.

Piper sit thee down and write
In a book that all may read—
So he vanish'd from my sight,
And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs,
Every child may joy to hear.



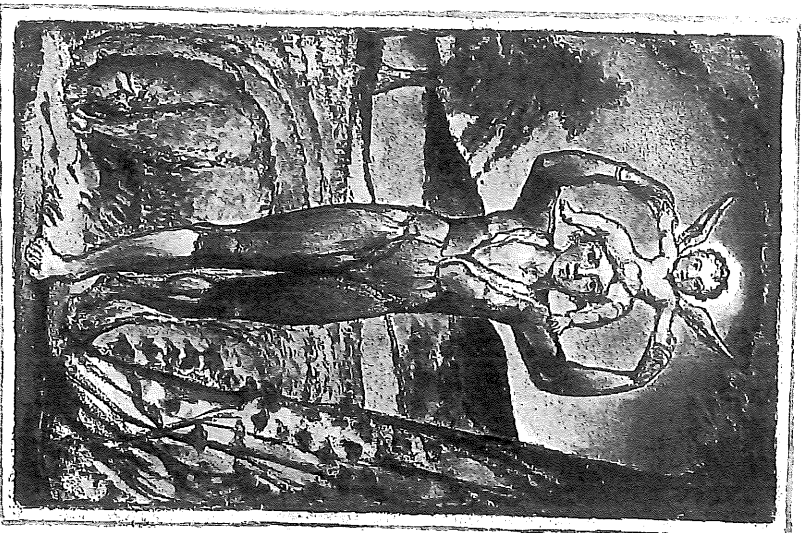
The Shepherd.

How sweet is the Shepherds sweet lot,
From the morn to the evening he strays;
He shall follow his sheep all the day
And his tongue shall be filled with praise.

For he hears the lambs innocent call,
And he hears the ewes tender reply,
He is watchful while they are in peace,
For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.

The Echoing Green

The Sun does arise
And make happy the skies:
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring,
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around.



SONGS of EXPERIENCE

[29]

1794

The Author & Printer W Blake

Introduction.

[30]

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees?
Whose ears have heard,
The Holy Word,³
That walk'd among the ancient trees.

5

2. In *Jerusalem* 15:8–9 the artisan-prophet Los, trying to awaken Albion, sees “the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once / Before me.”
3. In John 1:1 Jesus is identified as the Word. In *Paradise Lost* 10:71–108, the Son rather than the Father calls Adam (discussed in Frye’s 1957 commentary on “Introduction.”; rpt. *Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays* [1966]). Dennis M. Welch, *English Studies* 76:3 (1995), 238–52, counter-arguing Michael Ackland, *Studies in Romanticism* (1980) and others, explores this point as a touchstone for interpreting such controversial poems as “The Tyger.”



Calling the lapsed Soul
And weeping⁴ in the evening dew:
That⁵ might controll,
The starry pole;⁶
And fallen fallen light renew!

10

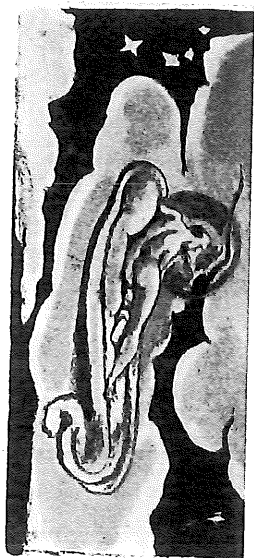
O Earth O Earth return!⁷
Arise from out the dewy grass;
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous mass.

15

4. Perhaps alluding to Jesus’ tears over Lazarus (John 11:35) and his lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37).
5. Ambiguous antecedent. Is it the Soul or the Word who could reverse the fallen state if only it chose to?
6. In Pope’s translation of Homer’s *Iliad*, Jupiter boasts: “Who shall the sovereign of the skies controul? / Not all the gods that crown the starry pole” (8:472–73). In Edward Young’s *The Last Day* 3.10, “the starry pole” is the muse’s vantage point.
7. Echoing Jeremiah 22:29: “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord” and Spenser’s *Hymn of Heavenly Love*, 218–25: “Then rouse thyself, O Earth, out of thy soil . . . / And read through love His mercies manifold.”

Turn away no more:
Why wilt thou turn away
The starry floor
The watry shore
Is giv'n thee till the break of day.⁸

20



EARTH'S Answer.

31

Earth rais'd up her head,
From the darkness dread & drear.
Her light fled;
Stony dread!
And her locks cover'd with grey despair,
Prison'd on watry shore
Starry jealousy does keep my den⁹
Cold and hoar
Weeping o'er
I hear the Father of the ancient men
Selfish father of men
Cruel jealous selfish fear!
Can delight
Chain'd in night
The virgins of youth and morning bear,
Does spring hide its joy
When buds and blossoms grow?
Does the sower?
Sow by night?
Or the plowman in darkness plow?
Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around
Selfish! vain!

20

15

10

5

Eternal panel!
That free Love with bondage bound.²

25

The CLOD & the PEBBLE

32

Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care;
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hells despair.
So sung a little Clod of Clay,
Trdden with the cartles feet:
But a Pebble of the brook,
Warbled out these metres meet.

5

Love seeketh only Self to please,
To bind another to its delight:
Joys in anothers loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heavens despite.³

10

HOLY THURSDAY⁴

33

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery
Fed with cold and usurous hand?
Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!
And their sun does never shine.
And their fields are bleak & bare.
And their ways are fill'd with thorns
It is eternal winter there.
For where-e'er the sun does shine,
And where-e'er the rain does fall:
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

5

10

15

8. In Jeremiah 5:22 (cf. Job 38:8, 11), the shore is a providential limit to the sea. Whether the stars form a floor or a ceiling as the Earth rotates is a matter of perspective.
9. Benighted Earth, personified as female but speaking for all of humanity, experiences her condition, limited by the "floor" and "shore," as imprisonment by an all-powerful paternalistic oppressor.
1. She hears the Holy Word's loving plea to "return" as the cold command of a remote, unfeeling "Father," the "jealous God" of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5)

2. Understanding this pair of opening poems is complicated by perspectives introduced in the designs, showing a nude female, presumably Earth, stretched out on a floating couch ("Introduction") and a serpent with head raised and mouth wide open, undulating along the ground ("Earth's Answer").
3. The Clod's song recalls Saint Paul's praise of selfless love in 1 Corinthians 13; the Pebbles recalls Satan's defiant assertion in *Paradise Lost* 1.254-255: "The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven." Michael Ferber defends the Clod in *Prophetic Character* (2003), ed. Gouday.
4. See n. 1, p. 22 herein. Neither Maundy Thursday before Easter, nor Ascension Day, the fortieth day of Easter tide (Thomas E. Connolly, *Blake Studies* 6:2 [1975], 179-87).

The Angel

41

I Dreamt a Dream! what can it mean?
And that I was a maiden Queen:
Guarded by an Angel mild:
Witless woe, was ne'er begun!⁴

And I wept both night and day
And he wip'd my tears away
And I wept both day and night
And hid from him my hearts delight

So he took his wings and fled:
Then the morn blush'd rosy red:
I dried my tears & arm'd my fears,
With ten thousand shields and spears.

Soon my Angel came again:
I was arm'd, he came in vain;
For the time of youth was fled
And grey hairs were on my head.

The Tyger

42

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire!
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?⁵

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears⁶
And water'd heaven with their tears:

Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?⁷

Tyger, Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



My Pretty ROSE TREE⁸

43

A flower was offered to me;
Such a flower as May never bore.
But I said I've a Pretty Rose-tree,
And I passed the sweet flower o'er.

Then I went to my Pretty Rose-tree;
To tend her by day and by night.
But my Rose turn'd away with jealousy:
And her thorns were my only delight.

AH! SUN-FLOWER

Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun:
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the travellers journey is done.

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow:
Arise from their graves and aspire,
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.⁹

4. For drafts, see p. 380 herein.
5. In one copy, Blake altered "g" what" to "form'd thy." In the letterpress text issued by his friend Thomas Maltin these words appeared as "forged thy," along with other slight variants.
6. Cf. Urizen's lament: "The stars threw down their spears and fled naked away / We fell" (*The Four Zoas*, V, 64:27–28), alluding to the apocalyptic fall of the stars (Revelation 6:13, 12:4; Daniel 8:10), and the war in Heaven (Revelation 12:7–8; *Paradise Lost* 5–6).

7. The counterpart poem in *Innocence* obliquely alludes to Jesus as Lamb of God (see n. 2, p. 15 herein). For samplings of the many controversies in "Tyger studies" (Gleacher and Greenberg, 1989), see Winston Weathers, ed. *The Tyger* (1969), Grant, *Iowa Review* (1989), Bruce Borowsky (1996, www.english.uiowa.edu/whlakesongs/42/42hb.html), Bloom, ed. *William Blake* (2003), and Behrendt, p. 547 herein. Interpretations are further complicated by the unusually sharp disparity between impressions of the beast in the text and in the image (nomenacting, viewed from the side). In two versions the Tyger actually smiles: Coptic B (1794) and Y (c. 1825).
8. This poem and the two that follow, printed on the same plate, make up the only three-poem sequence that, of course, never changed in Blake's many rearrangements of the *Songs*.
9. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the nymph Clytie, rejected by Apollo, pines away until she becomes a heliotrope, a flower that always turns toward the sun. Grant, *Blake Studies* 5 (1974), 7–64, explores variations on the sunflower motif.