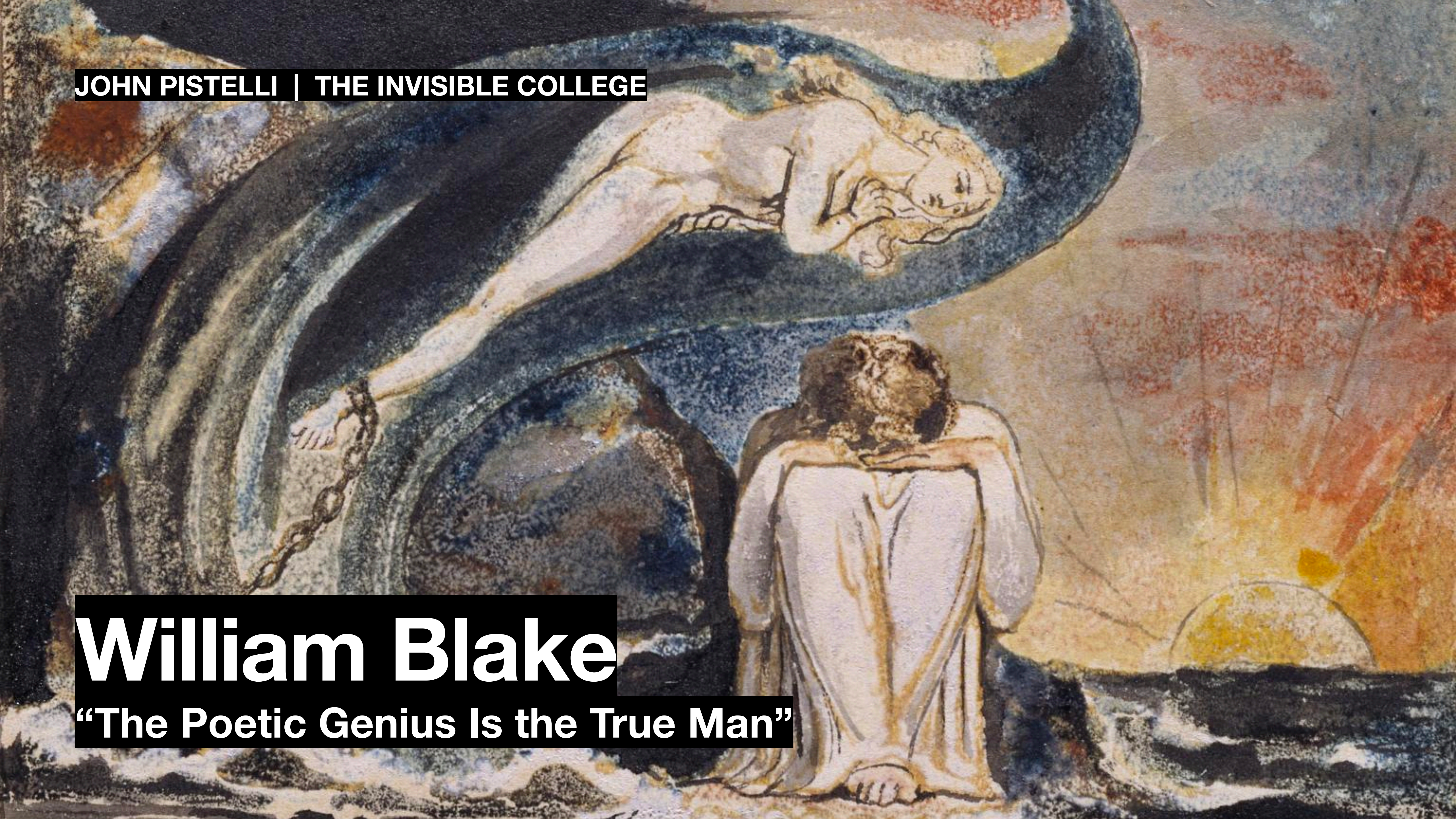


JOHN PISTELLI | THE INVISIBLE COLLEGE

# William Blake

“The Poetic Genius Is the True Man”



# William Blake

1757-1827

- Born in London to a working-class family and almost never left the city; raised in the religious tradition of Protestant Dissent
- Only education was in art, culminating in a seven-years' apprenticeship to an engraver beginning at age 14
- Married Catherine Boucher at age 24, taught her to read, and made a modest living as an engraver and illustrator
- Only traditionally published book of poems was *Poetic Sketches* (1885)
- Self-published through his own engraving process his own books in very limited editions, beginning with *Songs of Innocence* (1889) and culminating in *Jerusalem* (1820)



# William Blake

1757-1827

- Was patronized by William Hayley and brought to live at Hayley's pastoral Felpham residence in Sussex in 1800; began to resent Hayley and was tried for treason when he threw a soldier out of his garden
- Gave up poetry for art in the last years of his life and illustrated The Book of Job, Chaucer, Dante; mounted an exhibition whose self-written catalogue was denounced as the production of a lunatic
- Was a visionary who saw angels and spirits throughout his life, and was attracted to radical and mystical religious systems such as Swedenborg's
- Was a political radical who initially sympathized with the American and French Revolutions; with the failure of the latter began to emphasize imaginative and spiritual rather than political revolution



# William Blake

1757-1827

- Was unknown in his own time, especially since his self-published work didn't circulate widely, but began to be recovered by the Pre-Raphaelites and was fully embraced by the modernists; then exercised influence on literature, counterculture (Beats), and popular culture (graphic novels) in the 20th century
- Prophetic books, especially *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, are difficult texts anticipating works like *Finnegans Wake*, whose significance only began to be explained in the 20th century by critics like Frye and Bloom, though Blake's earlier and shorter poems continue to circulate popularly



# Blake's Poetic Credo and Artistic Method

## Poet and Artist

Conclusion. If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again.

*Poetical Sketches* was the only book of Blake's to be set in type according to customary methods. In 1788 he began to experiment with relief etching, a method that he called "illuminated printing" (a term associating his works with the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages) and used to produce most of his books of poems. Working directly on a copper plate with pens, brushes, and an acid-resistant medium, he wrote the text in reverse (so that it would print in the normal order) and also drew the illustration; he then etched the plate in acid to eat away the untreated copper and leave the design standing in relief. The pages printed from such plates were colored by hand in water colors, often by Catherine Blake, and stitched together to make up a volume. This process was laborious and time-consuming, and Blake printed very few copies of his books; for example, of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* only twenty-eight copies (some of them incomplete) are known to exist; of *The Book of Thel*, sixteen; of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, nine; and of *Jerusalem*, five.

But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.<sup>8</sup>

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

# Songs of Innocence and Experience (1794)

## Two Introductions



# Songs of Innocence and Experience (1794)

## Limits of Innocence and Experience

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### The CLOD & the PEBBLE

Love seeketh not Itself to please,  
Nor for itself hath any care;  
But for another gives its ease,  
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair.

So sang a little Clod of Clay,  
Trodden with the cattle's feet:  
But a Pebble of the brook,  
Warbled out these metres meet.

Love seeketh only Self to please,  
To bind another to its delight;  
Joys in another's lals of ease,  
And builds a Hell in Heavens despite.



9



### The Little Black Boy

My mother bore me in the southern wild,  
And I am black, but O! my soul is white,  
White as an angel is the English child:  
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree  
And sitting down before the heat of day,  
She took me on her lap and kissed me,  
And pointing to the east began to say.

Look on the rising sun: there God does live,  
And gives his light, and gives his heat away,  
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive  
Comfort in morning joy in the noon day.

And we are put on earth a little space,  
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,  
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face  
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

For

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# Songs of Innocence and Experience (1794)

## Two Animals






# Songs of Innocence and Experience (1794)

## Image, Abstract, and Nature

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### The Divine Image.

To Mercy Pity Peace and Love.  
All pray in their distrels;  
And to these virtues of delight  
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy Pity Peace and Love,  
Is God our Father dear;  
And Mercy Pity Peace and Love,  
Is Man his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart  
Pity a human face;  
And Love, the human form divine,  
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man of every clime,  
That prays in his distrel,  
Prays to the human form divine,  
Love Mercy Pity Peace.

And all must love the human form,  
In heathen, Turk or Jew,  
Where Mercy Love & Pity dwell,  
There God is dwelling too.

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### The Human Abstract.

Pity would be no more,  
If we did not make somebody Poor;  
And Mercy no more could be,  
If all were as happy as we;

And mutual fear brings peace;  
Till the selfish loves increase.  
Then Cruelty knits a snare,  
And spreads his baits with care.

He sits down with holy fears,  
And waters the ground with tears;  
Then Humility takes its root  
Underneath his foot.

Soon spreads the dismal shade  
Of Mystery over his head,  
And the Catterpillar and Fly  
Feed on the Mystery.

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,  
Ruddy and sweet to eat;  
And the Raven his nest has made  
In its thickest shade.

The Gods of the earth and sea,  
Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree,  
But their search was all in vain;  
There grows one in the Human Brain.



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### To My Mother

Whatever is Born of Mortal Birth,  
Must be consumed with the Earth  
To rise from Generation free;  
Then what have I to do with thee?

The Sexes sprung from Shame & Pride  
Blow'd in the morn; in evening dyed,  
But Mercy chang'd Death into Sleep;  
The Sexes rose to work & weep.

Thou Mother of my Mortal part,  
With cruelty didst mould my Heart,  
And with false self-deceiving tears,  
Didst bind my Nostri's Eyes & Ears.

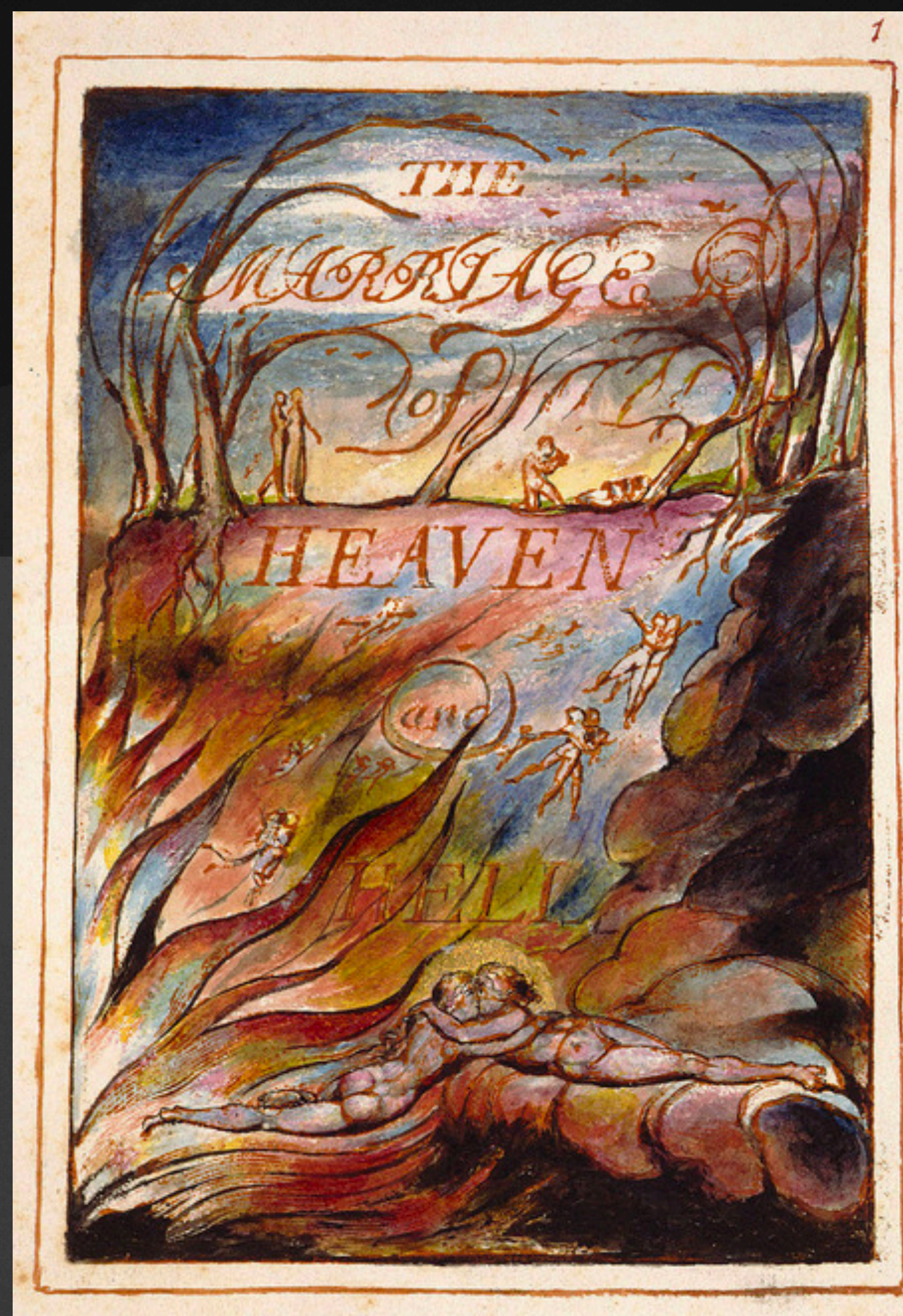
Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay  
And me to Mortal Life betray;  
The Death of Jesus set me free,  
Then what have I to do with thee?



It is Raised  
a Spiritual Body

# *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793)

## Contra Milton



Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.

Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.

And being restrained, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire.

The history of this is written in *Paradise Lost*,<sup>5</sup> & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah.

But in Milton, the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio<sup>9</sup> of the five senses, & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!

Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it.

# The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1793)

## The Proverbs of Hell



Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.  
The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.  
The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.  
The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.  
The nakedness of woman is the work of God.  
Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps.  
The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea,  
and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye  
of man.  
The fox condemns the trap, not himself.  
Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth.  
Let man wear the fell of the lion, woman the fleece of the sheep.  
The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship.  
The selfish smiling fool & the sullen frowning fool shall be both thought  
wise, that they may be a rod.  
What is now proved was once only imagin'd.  
The rat, the mouse, the fox, the rabbit watch the roots; the lion, the tyger,  
the horse, the elephant, watch the fruits.  
The cistern contains; the fountain overflows.  
One thought fills immensity.  
Always be ready to speak your mind, and a base man will avoid you.  
Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth.  
The eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn of the  
crow.

# *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793)

## The Poetic Genius Was the First Principle



Then I asked: "Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so?"

He replied: "All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of any thing."

Then Ezekiel said: "The philosophy of the East taught the first principles of human perception. Some nations held one principle for the origin & some another; we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests & Philosophers of other countries, and prophecying that all Gods [PL 13] would at last be proved to originate in ours & to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius; it was this that our great poet, King David, desired so fervently & invokes so pathetically, saying by this he conquers enemies & governs kingdoms; and we so loved our God, that we cursed in his name all the deities of surrounding nations, and asserted that they had rebelled; from these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the Jews."

"This," said he, "like all firm persuasions, is come to pass, for all nations believe the Jews' code and worship the Jews' god, and what greater subjection can be?"

# *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793)

## The Prison of the Flesh



I cry arise O Theotormon for the village dog  
Barks at the breaking day, the nightingale has done lamenting,  
The lark does rustle in the ripe corn, and the Eagle returns  
From nightly prey, and lifts his golden beak to the pure east;  
Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions to awake  
The sun that sleeps too long. Arise my Theotormon I am pure.  
Because the night is gone that clos'd me in its deadly black.  
They told me that the night & day were all that I could see;<sup>3</sup>  
They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up.  
And they inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle,  
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning  
Till all from life I was obliterated and erased.  
Instead of morn arises a bright shadow, like an eye  
In the eastern cloud; instead of night a sickly charnel house;  
That Theotormon hears me not! to him the night and morn  
Are both alike: a night of sighs, a morning of fresh tears;

# Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793)

## Free Love



The moment of desire! the moment of desire! The virgin  
That pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys  
In the secret shadows of her chamber; the youth shut up from  
The lustful joy shall forget to generate, & create an amorous image  
In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds of his silent pillow.  
Are not these the places of religion? the rewards of continence!  
The self enjoyings of self denial? Why dost thou seek religion?  
Is it because acts are not lovely, that thou seekest solitude,  
Where the horrible darkness is impressed with reflections of  
desire.<sup>9</sup>

Father of Jealousy, be thou accursed from the earth!  
Why hast thou taught my Theotormon this accursed thing?  
Till beauty fades from off my shoulders darken'd and cast out,  
A solitary shadow wailing on the margin of non-entity.<sup>1</sup>

I cry, Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain  
wind!

Can that be Love, that drinks another as a sponge drinks water?  
That clouds with jealousy his nights, with weepings all the day:  
To spin a web of age around him, grey and hoary! dark!  
Till his eyes sicken at the fruit that hangs before his sight.  
Such is self-love that envies all! a creeping skeleton  
With lamplike eyes watching around the frozen marriage bed.

# Milton (1804-1810)

## Mental Fight



### PREFACE.

The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid; of Plato & Cicero. which all Men ought to condemn; are set up, by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible. but when the New Age is at leisure to pronounce; all will be set right. For those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly Inspired Men, will hold their proper rank. & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration. Shakespears & Miltons were both curbd by the venereal malady & venectian from the silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword. Rouse up O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant Herdmen. For we have no Kings in the Camp, the Court, & the University: who would if they could, for ever depress Ment at & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! on you I call! Sculptors! Architects! Suffer not the fashionable Fads to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works, or the expensive adverting boasts that they make of such works; believe Christ & his Apostles that there is a Class of Men whose whole delight is in Destroying. We do not want either Greek or Roman Models if we are but just & true to our own Imaginations. those Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live for ever; in Jesus our Lord.

And did those feet in ancient time,  
Walk upon Englands mountains green;  
And was the Holy Lamb of God,  
On Englands pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;  
Bring me my Arrows of desire;  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold;  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand;  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In Englands green & pleasant Land

Would to God that all the Lords people  
were Prophets Numbers XI. ch. 20.