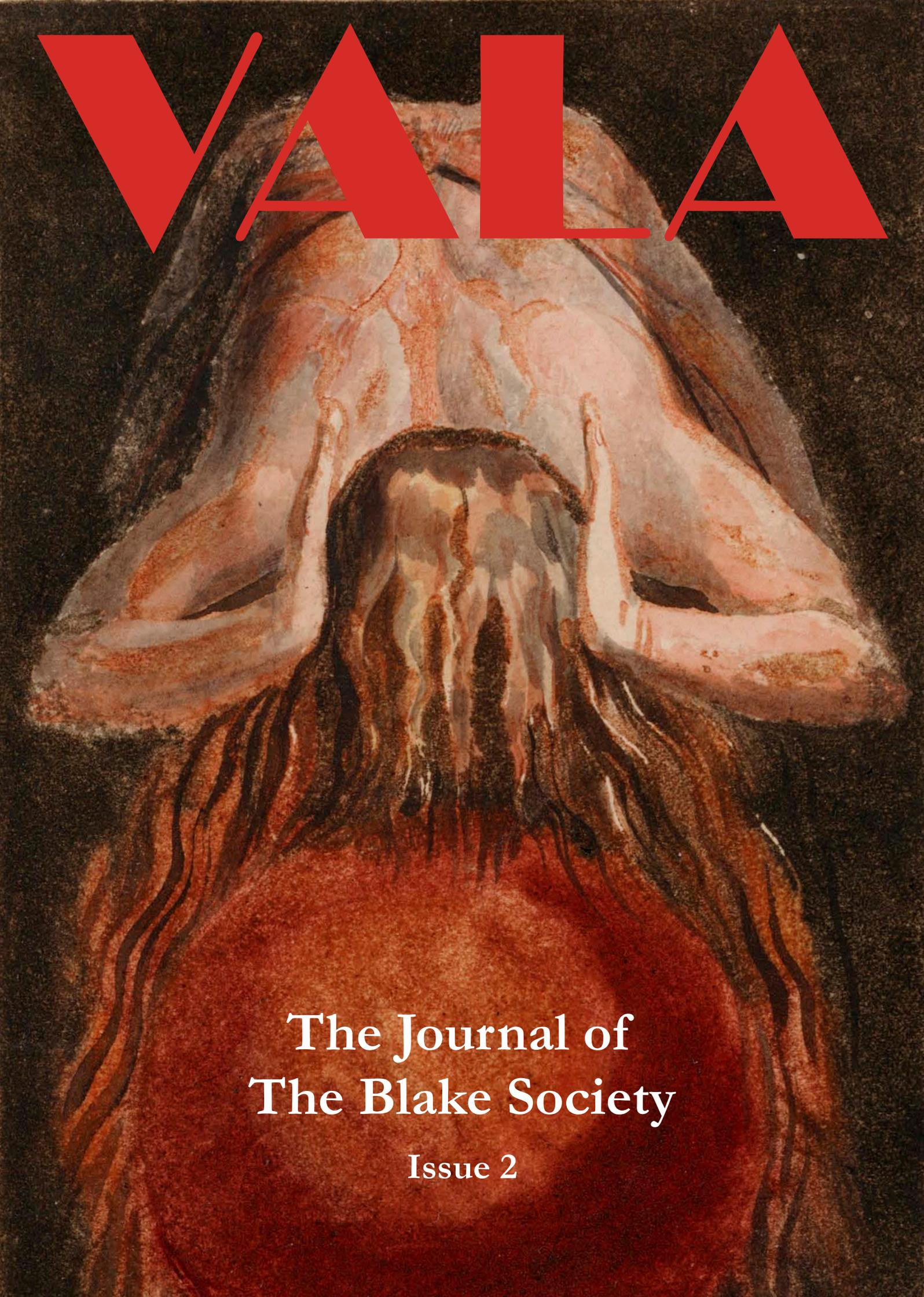


W A L A



The Journal of
The Blake Society

Issue 2



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Some Things Need to be Seen to Exist: What's in a name?

Sibylle Erle

Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* tells the story of an extraordinary woman. Oothoon, who has been raped and called a 'harlot' (pl. 1, l. 18, E46), picks herself up to announce that she — despite everything — is 'pure' (pl. 2, l. 28, E47). While her words and actions may impress and even influence the men around her (Bromion, her brutal rapist and Theotormon, her languishing lover), Oothoon's character is one of stability; it provides her with emotional resilience. She knows that she has been impregnated not only with a child, but also with the language of others. Oothoon has reflected, she is aware and she shares her intellectual insight into the psychological practices of what is now known as gaslighting:

They told me that the night & day were all I
could see;
They told me that I had five senses to inclose
me up.
And they inclos'd my infinite brain into a
narrow circle
(*Visions*, pl. 2, ll. 30-31, E47)

That injustice has not gone unfelt; Oothoon is in a lot of pain. But who, I ask, is listening?

It is nothing new to suggest that patriarchal societies limit the rights of women. Women are denied the same opportunities as men, as long as social practices invalidate their lives and marginalise their experience. Women are excluded or treated as inferior. We need justice. While such discrimination can be detected easily in acts of aggression or outdated traditions that unthinkingly favour men, it can also be extremely subtle; it is often internalised, i.e. subconscious and invisible. By giving expression to a character's courage, her (or his) words reach us — Blake's modern readers.

In Blake's mythology, all figures are eventually subsumed into the Human Form Divine — the giant Albion. In Blake's *Eternity*, this character guarantees sexual equality. Although all Blake's characters disappear into Albion's chest, this (or rather his) state of being is brought about through female sacrifice. In Blake's version of the Fall, redemption becomes an experience of reintegration. Redemption causes female figures, quite literally, to dissolve. That leads to the reappearance of Albion, the man who represents universal humanity according to the creation of God's image in Genesis.

What further complicates gender in Blake is that he masculinises female bodies or feminises male bodies. The alternative to such reintegration might be a reunion of Blake's mythical personages, leading to marriage. This, however, is not what Blake envisioned.

Vala, the figure after whom this journal is named, can be understood as a symbol or metaphor that embodies attitudes towards women, nature and gender. As a concept, Vala contrasts sharply with Jerusalem, the bride of Albion. In Blake's mythology, Vala is a minor character, but a force to be reckoned with. She is destructive and divisive, but also capable of protection and healing. What makes her dangerous is the possession of will ('Female Will'). To possess will suggests choice, but it also empowers and enables selfishness. For Western sensibilities, to have a *will* (of one's own to evoke Virginia Woolf's argument in *A Room of One's Own*) is non-negotiable. Besides, as many Blake scholars have

pointed out, it is important to differentiate between the poet and his characters, who may have conflicting opinions, which are not necessarily Blake's own.

In Blake's mythology, Vala exists in the webs of male and female family relationships. In his poetry, the connections are reinforced through allusion. Gender relations, as we all know, determine the process of associating people with certain qualities, characteristics or even roles. Vala is sister, mother, daughter, lover, wife, Emanation, Goddess of Nature and shapeshifter. Vala is always on the move; she is beautiful, proud and bossy. She is also emotional and an active dreamer. This continual reimagining of her personhood as it unfolds across Blake's oeuvre extends, moreover, to how her name should be pronounced. Readers familiar with William Blake may speculate about a pun, evoking veiling or being veiled. The idea might be justified by his art, where Vala is a hidden figure, perhaps a master of disguise, who chooses self-preservation or self-restraint. But it suggests a specific way of saying the word 'Vala'. Further, the concept of a 'veil' might suggest a character that is all too quickly dismissed, relegated to the shadow version of herself. Vala is hidden and therefore not visible; it does not follow that she is physically absent.

Who can decide how Blake intended the word 'Vala' to be spoken? How should we pronounce it? Everything depends on how it plays out. Ideas, like people, can win. Here is another question: Are we prepared to accept those characteristics we are told define 'us'? The alternative is indifference or a façade of muteness: all is as if seen from far away or rather appears as if seen through a veil.

Contributors to this issue of *VALA*, which had the working title 'Invisible (Female) Bodies', were asked to think about 'invisible women' and gender in Blake. They approached their task academically and/or creatively, and in extraordinarily diverse ways. What they have created is in immediate proximity. Reach out, read more Blake; connect and enjoy!

Sibylle Erle

Editor of *VALA: The Journal of The Blake Society*,

A note from the illustrator

A few words about the image I created to present this short poem. The images and thoughts that came to mind were about the hidden pain and lasting damage caused to women's bodies, and often to their minds too, while trying to create new life. I have so many friends who have had strings of miscarriages, and some (including myself) who have sustained permanent, serious damage by having a child, and others still who have been through this mental and physical pain — and then also had to accept that their bodies will not create new life. Most often these women don't talk about the violence, desperation and fear of these experiences, even to each other. Society presents pregnancy as a joyful, wonderful, natural thing, through which women radiate a sort of heavenly beauty. This couldn't be further from my experience, and that of most women I know. I wanted to show that unknown, unspoken of, silent warrior, curled in on herself in her private pain. She is creating new life, but consumed and damaged in doing so.

Tamsin Rosewell



*The unknown warriors on
this battlefield called Life
Gave and give the most that
one can give, Life itself.*

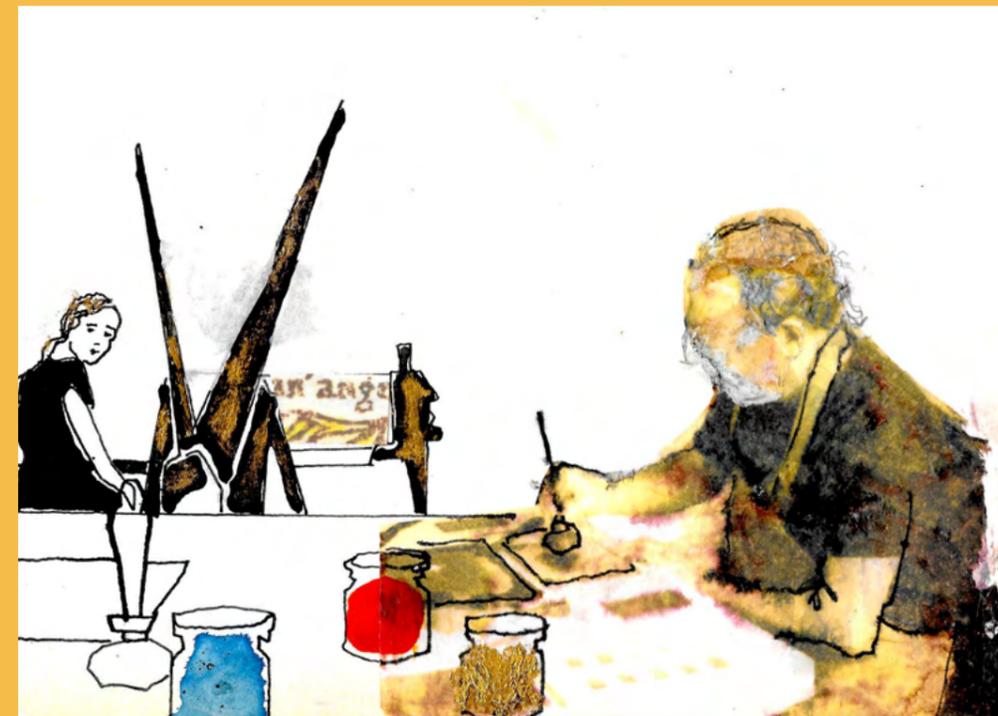
(Anonymous)

Catherine



Louisa Albani

Louisa Albani creates art pamphlets inspired by the work and lives of literary figures including Mary Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf. In 2019 she published *William Blake's Mystic Map of London*. For this issue of *VALA* we asked Louisa to consider Catherine Blake's role in William's work and she responded with this stunning series of artworks.



One of the most inspiring pieces of research I undertook, in relation to William Blake's printing process, was watching a British Library video, in which Michael Phillips demonstrates Blake's printing process whilst explaining how it relates to his work as an artist and poet: <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/william-blake-printing-process>

Phillips sets the scene with great authenticity and knowledge, explaining how in Blake's single room, on the ground floor of Hercules Buildings in Lambeth, 'he did it all', which is one of the things we admire him for.

But of course he wasn't completely alone, for he was assisted by his wife Catherine, in quite significant ways. In her interview with *The Guardian*, Tate curator Amy Concannon explains that Catherine was 'a critical part of the process' and 'central to Blake's printing and colouring processes' (2019).

This small collection of artworks, created specifically for this issue of *VALA*, celebrate Catherine's rightful 'place' next to Blake in the printing process. Her work, her labour, her presence, remain invisible — let's redress this so that we can recognise the importance of her contribution.

<https://www.nightbirdpress.com>

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Thorpe, Vanessa, 'How William Blake's wife brought colour to his works of genius', *The Guardian*, 7 September 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/sep/07/william-blake-wife-catherine-brought-colour-works-of-genius-tate-britain>> [accessed 29 July 2021]



Is that you, Grandma?

Reflections on Thel and the Lilly of the Valley

Joan Digby

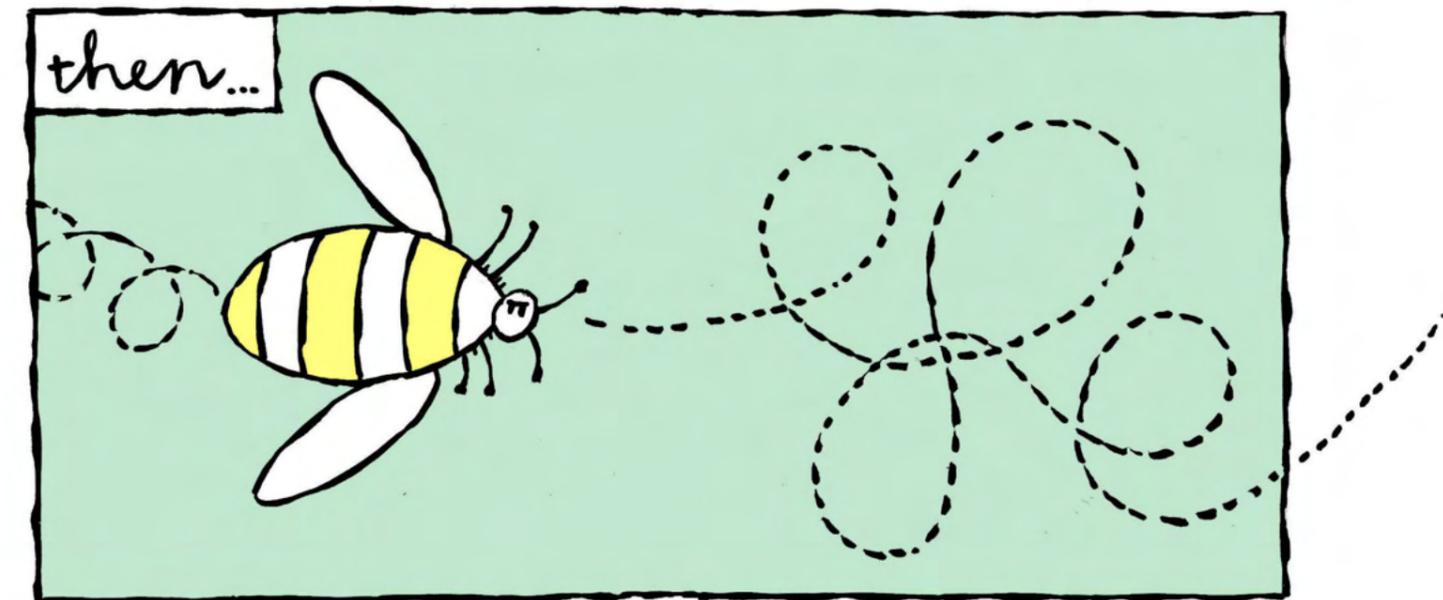
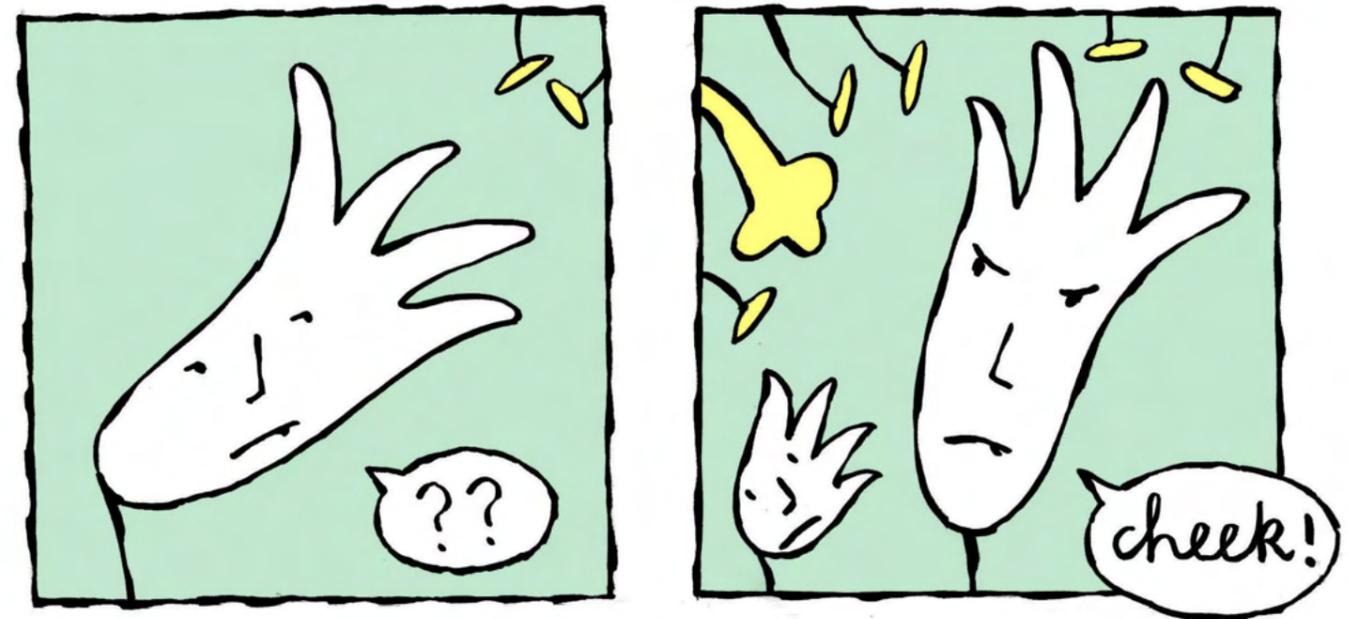
Illustration by Sally Kindberg

The Lilly (Blake's spelling) of the Valley in *The Book of Thel* has always taken me back into personal family history. The flower's defense of transience, fragility, and self-sacrifice failed to coax into mortality the quivering, fearful virgin being — Thel. In *Thel* I recover the existential fears of my grandmother, an American-Victorian born in 1887, who could never accept the horror of sexuality or death as the endpoint of life. She had an only child, my mother before her husband died at the age of 40, freeing her from sexual 'obligation'. But her terror of men extended even to my brother at birth — a proto-man, a boy! And in the end, she went out as angry as a tiger, her heart exploding in protest that her life should not go on forever.

Blake's poem — framed as a philosophical dialogue with a touch of Aesopic fable — is composed as a sequence of arguments focused on refuting the refusal of Innocence to embrace the natural life cycle: 'why fades the lotus of the water?' (*Thel*, pl. 1, l. 6, E3), Thel questions. The cloud, the rainbow, the shadow, 'a smile upon an infants face' (pl. 1,

l. 10, E3) are all likenesses of herself, 'born but to smile & fall' (pl. 1, l. 7, E3), a fading she cannot accept. Her complaint is first addressed by the delicate Lilly, 'little virgin of the peaceful valley' (pl. 2, l. 3, E4), the perfect projection of a fragile Thel but one who has found meaning in offering herself to gratify others' needs.

Allegorizing the nature of women as flowers has a long history in world poetry. During the eighteenth century in England, it was well-represented in emblem books and fables framed as ethical tales of female virtue — a word ripe with sexual overtones. John Langhorne's *Fables of Flora* (1771) makes the Sunflower a symbol of the nun who gives up womanly life on earth for love of God. This is an idea that Blake directly and profoundly rejects in 'Ah! Sun-flower' from *Songs of Experience*, which ends with the 'pale Virgin shrouded in snow' (l. 6, E25) — a fate that Thel might face if she agrees to be born, live, and die on earth. In Langhorne's collection, another retiring flower, lowly and modestly shy, is the Violet that we still call 'shrinking'. She



hides her beauty in her 'humbler hue' that is the 'clothing of the skies' (1771: 37), making her less vulnerable than the bright Pansy. In these poems, Langhorne's male protagonist — and sometimes rapist — is the bee who steals the flower's sweetness and then flees. The assailant in Blake's 'The Sick Rose', although a worm, has much in common with the violation narratives of Langhorne.

On the title-page of *The Book of Thel*, a male figure with looming stamens hovering over a female within a drooping flower implies a sexual narrative that is not concealed in darkness. Surprisingly, sex is not even a subject addressed in the poem, only referenced obliquely in this flower as an allusion to generation.

Blake might not have read Langhorne's book (though the contrasting sunflower-as-nun poems might make the case), but he surely knew and borrowed from Erasmus Darwin (grandfather to Charles), who described the sexuality of flowers by human analogy. Darwin's 'The Loves of the Plants' (1789) is part of *The Botanic Garden*, for which Blake produced one illustration. It is easy to see why Blake might have internalized Darwin's depiction both of open sexuality and male aggressiveness. The work is a scholarly, original compendium of botanical knowledge composed in prose and poetry. Darwin represents the sexual parts of flowers as men and women in courtship, even some in clandestine marriages (common in eighteenth-century life and literature). A plant with ten stamens and five pistils, for example, give rises to a narrative of ten men vying to become the lovers of five women. His tales of harems, group sex, and sexual conflict are worthy of Sir David Attenborough!

As David Erdman notes in *The Illuminated Blake* (1974), flower plates in *The Book of Thel* may be indebted to Darwin's book — the Amaryllis, the Tulip, and Medea in particular — but there is no illustration depicting the Lily of the Valley in Blake's work, possibly

because it did not appear in 'The Loves of the Plants'.

Erdman postulates that Darwin might have omitted that flower because it is 'too unpretentious in its blooming' (1974: 33), but there could be another reason. The Lily of the Valley self-pollinates, which might have given rise to a narrative even more awkward than those Darwin devised. Thus, the title-page of *Thel* shows an Anemone indebted to Darwin, as Erdman points out, depicting the dew and wind that open the petals as human figures (1974: 34). Darwin's description of the 'embrace' by Zephyr of the longing floral Nymph is far more charged than Blake's image. Yet, on another level, Blake's human figures may have greater emotional and sexual implications, related to the variance among coloured copies of the plate.

Thel as shepherdess in this plate seems a dispassionate voyeur. When Erdman published his notes in 1974, Catherine's role in bringing to life Blake's art was unrecognised, but the colour range of the ten extant title-pages — five pale, five bright — suggest that William might not have been the only colourist and that the couple may have had very different visions of

Thel as well as the drama taking place within the flower. One or the other Blake sees intensity — whether of joy or horror, Erdman argues, is not clear. In the context of Darwin, the emotion is positively joyful, but the tone of Blake's poem as a whole suggests that shock at the very least is the experience of the female virgin who questions near the very end of the poem, 'Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?' Why, in other words, should pleasure be tempered by pain? (*Thel*, pl. 6, l. 20, E6) — a question much discussed by eighteenth-century philosophers.

Given the flower's centrality on the title-page, it is natural that the 'Lilly of the valley' should be the first speaker to approach the complaining Thel. The essence of the Lilly's defense of transience is that after a sacrificial life as food and perfume for others, she will enjoy

the eternal presence of God. Although the poem does not specify Jesus, except by alluding to one who walks on earth and smiles at her, the argument is a religious expression of faith. Thel, herself, had already embraced the 'gentle sleep of death' and 'the voice | Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time' (*Thel*, pl. 1, l. 13 and ll. 13-14, E3). It is not the afterlife that distresses her, but this mortal life. So the Lilly passes her along first to the Cloud, then the Clod, then the Worm — all selfless, lowly beings whose faith shocks Thel. The ultimate horror comes when Thel is invited into the underworld of decaying bodies, viscerally experiencing death as 'A land of sorrow & tears' (pl. 6, l. 5, E6) that revolts her and sends her shrieking back to 'the vales of Har' (pl. 6, l. 22, E6). Who can blame her?

Or blame my grandmother, who complained ceaselessly about the transience of her life and the horror of it leading only to death. For me, *The Book of Thel* triggers memories of her girls' club, 'The Lilies of the Valley', a choice that could not have been more appropriate since her character was a combination of both Thel and the flower. During the early twentieth century in New York, girls formed clubs named for flowers. My

grandmother was a 'Lily', a symbol she identified with throughout her ninety years. Over more than seventy years, it functioned as a support group, transforming as the women's lives changed. It helped them survive the fears of marriage and childbirth. In Blakean openness, two of them actually switched husbands — divorced, remarried, and carried on as friends. Their selfless work included knitting socks for soldiers during the Second World War, teaching and working in business. In later years they traveled together and finally railed against death as they played cards and lost members until the last Lily was gone — my grandmother.

I pass away, yet I complain, and no one hears my voice. (*Thel*, pl. 3, l. 4, E4)

References and further reading

- Erdman, David V., *The Illuminated Blake: All of William Blake's Illuminated Works with Plate-by-Plate Commentary*, annotated and ed. by David V. Erdman (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974)
Langhorne, John, *The Fables of Flora* (London: John Murray, 1771)

For me, The Book of Thel triggers memories of her girls' club, 'The Lilies of the Valley', a choice that could not have been more appropriate since her character was a combination of both Thel and the flower.



On The Book of Thel and Pandemic Prophecies

Jodie Marley

Illustration by G. E. Gallas

Those who know me know of my obsession with Blake's poem *The Book of Thel*. When I was invited to contribute to VALA I knew I would write about Thel. In the midst of other projects, a global pandemic, and several strange 'visionary' experiences of my own, this piece was born. It is intended both as an introduction to the poem and a meditation on its relevance to collective anxieties at this moment in time.

In the first three-quarters of the poem, Thel longs for visionary experiences to distract from her feelings of inadequacy and purposelessness on earth, for a sign that she belongs to the world and the spiritual order of things. Although moved by other characters' accounts of their spiritual experiences through acts of service, Thel remains ambivalent about her purpose until she experiences a vision of the future in the form of her own corpse speaking from the grave. Her reaction is visceral horror, and she runs back home.

Thel's experience underground is transformative and horrifying. She is terrified by her vision, of what the voice says is awaiting her if she acts for herself rather than the collective. Hearing her own voice speaking from

the grave is just one event that comes after a growing number of unsettling experiences. She traverses 'a land of sorrows and tears' (*Thel*, pl. 6, l. 5., E6), and waits by the graves of several others, listening to the voices of

The theme of being underground or travelling through a dark and empty world appeared repeatedly in my dreams, and I thought of their similarity to Thel's visions.

others emanating from them. She sees 'secrets of the land unknown' (pl. 6, l. 2, E6). Blake never specifies what these 'secrets' are, but they may be

more upsetting than just the voices of the dead. That these secrets remain 'unknown' to the reader emphasises that Thel has seen something that we, the living, cannot: a disturbing, nameless vision. Thel sees 'the fibrous roots of every heart on earth' (pl. 6, ll. 3-4, E6) intertwined around her, a particularly grim image that evokes the sight of hundreds of intertwined arteries snaking their way through the earth. Thel feels not only her own vulnerabilities and sorrows, but those of humanity as well. She only realises then what the characters above ground have been telling her throughout the poem: that spiritual vision does not concern herself and her purpose alone, but in fact concerns her interactions with others too, emphasising a reality that transcends the boundaries of individual experience.





III.

id the Worm upon its dewy bed.

f weakness, art thou but a Worm?
rapped in the Lillys leaf:
ou canst not speak, but thou canst weep
e lay helpless & naked: weeping
e to cherish thee with mothers smiles

e Worms voice, & raisd her pitying he
ng infant, and her life exhald
n Thel she fixd her humble eyes.

Flur, we live not for ourselves,
at thing, and so I am indeed;
ld, and of itself is dark.

As the COVID-19 pandemic worsened, I experienced intense dreams. In one, I woke up in a cave with earthy walls, walked down a tunnel, and emerged at a half-empty London Underground station. I felt an increasing sense of dread as I boarded a train and spoke to a group of passengers. They said the pandemic was over and everything was fine. I felt unsettled because I was used to the tube being much busier. There were so few people about.

The theme of being underground or travelling through a dark and empty world appeared repeatedly in my dreams, and I thought of their similarity to Thel's visions. At the time, I was working on prophets in Blake's poetry for my Ph.D. thesis, having just read Lucy Cogan's article 'William Blake's *The Book of Los* and the Female Prophetic Tradition'. I wondered if my sleeping mind was trying to process both global tragedy and my thesis simultaneously. I do not believe that my dream was necessarily prophetic — rather it seemed to be a reflection of my deep anxiety that the advice of scientists, researchers, teachers, and unions on avoiding unneeded deaths and devastation, was not being heeded. I saw in my dream the realisation of my deepest fears surrounding the pandemic's outcome: of people not acting in the interest of the collective, of the virus wiping out our population. In relation to *The Book of Thel*, the dreams seemed to emphasise to me that Thel was a visionary and prophet, albeit an extremely reluctant one. She entered the gates to the underground and saw the present and future suffering not only of herself, but also of humanity.

For me, Blake's emphasis in *The Book of Thel's* conclusion is on the act of choice. This is perhaps why the poem and Thel's fate is left open-ended. Thel runs back to her earthly life, but we do not know what she chooses to do on her return. Seeing Thel's hesitancy to act in the earlier part of the poem, the Lilly offered her the visionary experience to help her reflect on her options. To apply the poem to our lives, Thel emphasises the nature of choice in the face of impending struggle and catastrophe. We can choose to act and integrate ourselves into helping the world. Or we can turn and run away. Prescience is useless if we do not use it to alleviate the human condition.

References and further reading

Cogan, Lucy, 'William Blake's *The Book of Los* and the Female Prophetic Tradition', *Romanticism*, 21.1 (2015), 48-58



When we met you seemed a child,
even though I was younger.



So easily hurt, a naked flame, like
you had no skin to protect you.



And I do love you.



In Lambeth we sat in our garden,
playing Adam and Eve.



A poet! A painter! Whose eye fell on me!



When we married, I signed with an X.



In Felpham you met with Milton and
we kicked the serpent out of our garden



You taught me to read, and now I read,
I write, I print, I draw and I paint.



You taught me to read and I taught you
to love, and to live, a little in this world.



but that only let the Devil in.



I do not think we will enjoy a garden again.

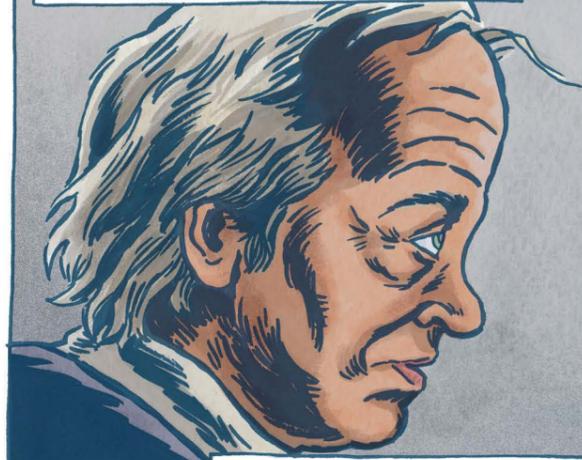


You turn the wheel and
I watch your head.



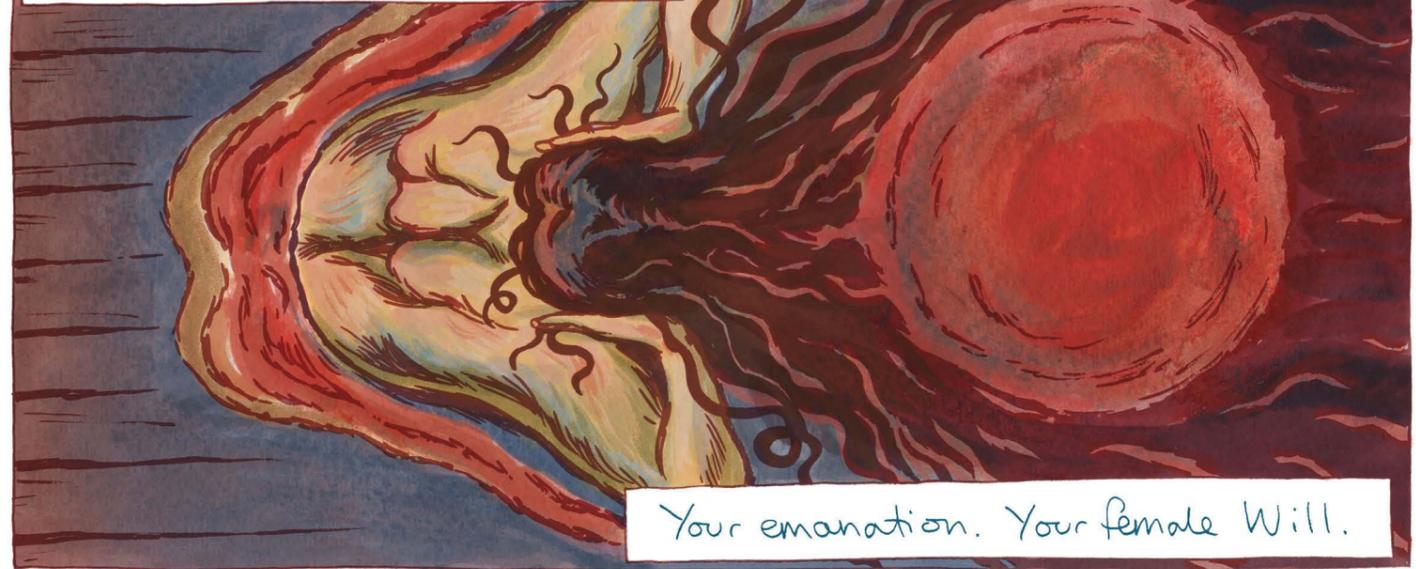
Your lovely big head, full of
songs and visions, angels and gods.

Wheels within wheels.



I wish I could enter it,
see through your eyes.

I put your work into the world.



Your emanation. Your female Will.



Your flame lights the fire and sometimes I print, and colour your books,

Wheels within wheels.



Meats beyond meats.

Ink on the plate, but sometimes
an empty plate for dinner.

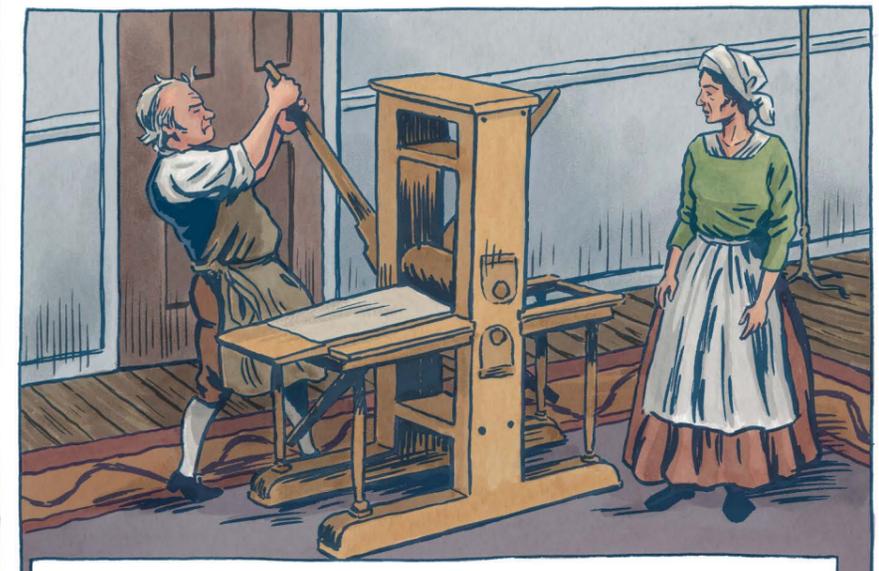


but mostly I sew and I cook, I sweep and sometimes I weep.

It is hard to live in this
world of kings, priests
and soldiers,



of Pitts, and... pittances.



Hard to be a prophet, and harder still to keep one.

Invisible Female Bodies

Marina White Raven

28.5.20

I am not just one body, this body, I am everybody. This body with its legs and arms, hands, feet, mouth, lips and eyes is visibly female and I see also the masculine, the animal and the ethereal in it.

Performing LIVE on ZOOM for **The Blake Society** was

fantastical,
inspirational
 and so very super specially...
exciting!

Encountering Blake has been both a delightful and desperate space; getting to know him through his paintings,

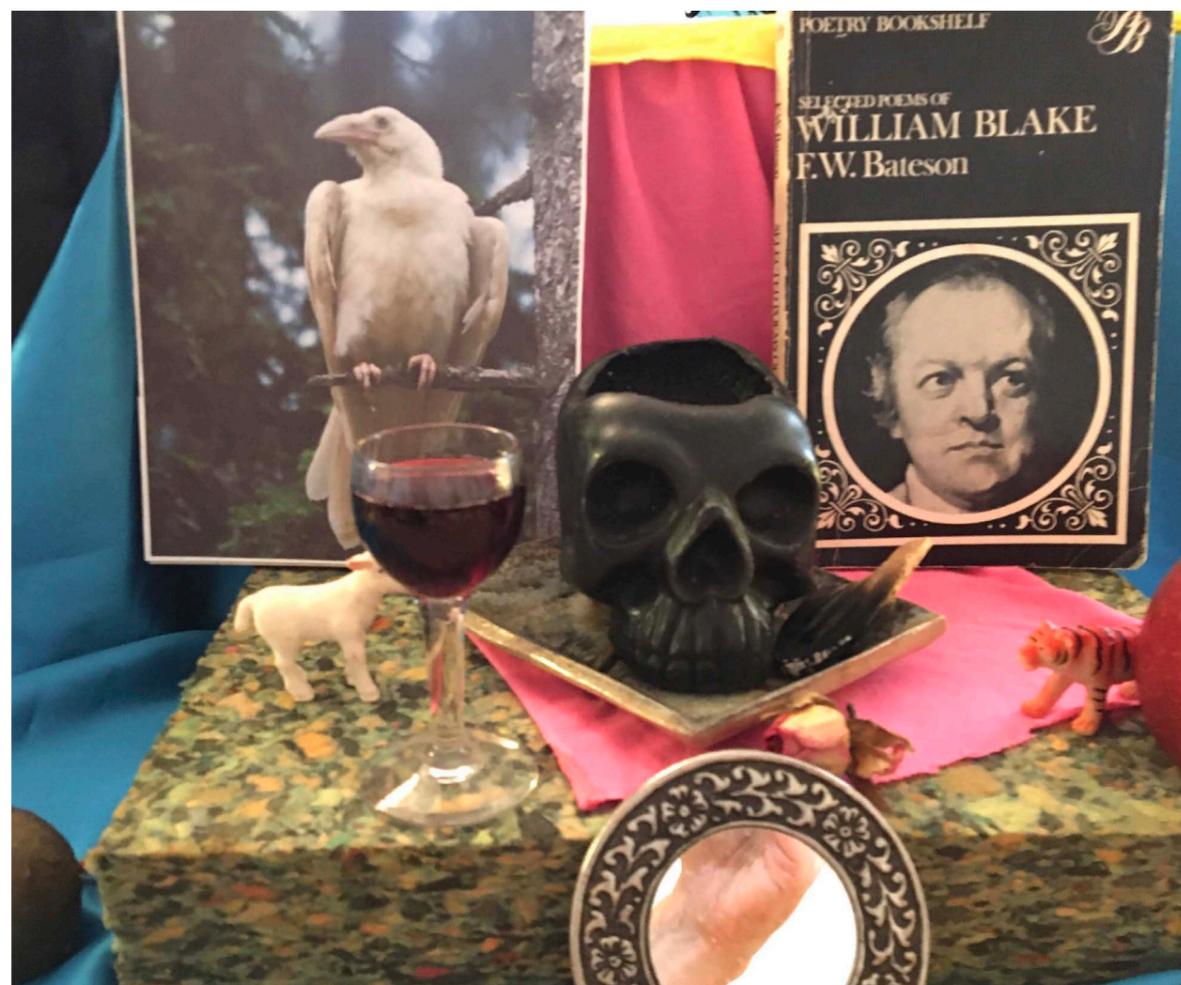
his poetry and lyrics, his letters and also what others have said and say about him. *William Blake embraced the imagination as the body of God...*

'The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination. God himself' (E273). Blake. *Laocoön*.

That is how I felt; that I was playing the **body of God**.

1. Setting the Altar.

The first scene of four. A tiny stage where the Gods play out their dramas; setting a table for things to happen, placing objects in relation to one another, lighting candles, ringing bells, lighting purifying Palo Santo from South America and fanning it with crow feathers.



Reflections on the experience of Encountering William Blake, a live-streamed performance during Lockdown 2020.

https://youtu.be/Q_MKE4nIZew

Serendipity: The colours of the fabrics for the altar cloths match those of the painting *Albion Rose* (c. 1793):

Sky Blue **Candy Pink** **Fondant Yellow**

I place the **black skull** candle in the centre. I experience the weight of its landing and how the other objects relate and fall around it, lit by its flame, victim to its fiery gaze. I place each object in a specific order:

William Blake poetry book

Photo of a White Raven (Landing together side by side)

Plastic tiger followed by plastic lamb

Teeny-tiny glass of red wine

Ripe red apple

Mexican Tree of Life ornament

Dried rosebud beside the black skull

...and finally a tiny ornate mirror right at the front, downstage centre, pointed out towards the viewer.

I am the puppet master, a giant god moving figures about a tiny stage, returned to a long-ago time: a child playing with toys, creating fantasy worlds, setting the stage for magical adventures to happen. A time where I contained infinity, within the safe space of my child mind and body. Sense memory that is both utterly familiar and that I have become disappointingly disconnected from.

Blake is about looking and seeing. The whole performance, I am aware of 'the gaze'. In addition to the black skull's blazing eyes, there is my gaze looking down at my body watching my own physical actions and also my gaze outside this body, watching and monitoring what is seen on screen, what they see. I place my gaze outside of myself, as witness, filtering a continuous loop of feedback, watching and monitoring multiple realities simultaneously. This is what turns me on as an artist and spiritual practitioner. There are many specific

points where this sense of multiplicity is intensified.

a tiny mirror at the front of the altar, reflecting part of the laptop keyboard and part of Blake's face from the cover of the poetry book back at the screen.

A cut is created with an A4 envelope; mobilizing the reflective black plastic, noticing the light reflections. Reflecting the reflection, the stripe in the plastic creates many lines like screen interference on analogue TV. As I move the envelope away from the screen, 'pulling out', my fingers are revealed, holding the envelope; they too are multiplied in reflections.

2. Hand Maid.

The upper part of my torso is clothed in a white apron dress. The frame features arms and hands with no head visible. The scene is a hand dance, exploring polarities and opposites, masculinity and femininity, repulsion and attraction.

The red rose I have been puppeting and caressing, moves closer to the screen, alongside red painted lips. Eventually mouth and rose fill the screen and a pink tongue pokes out from the red lips, teasing the red petals. Closing in further to extreme close up, the mouth begins to expose teeth and chew the rose in an incredibly intimate and edgy visual; both sexual and disembodied.

References:

Samuel Beckett: Disembodied mouth in *Not I*

David Lynch: Noir dream style movies

I notice the lips | my lips, initially feminine, sensual and seeking, becoming masculine, demanding, wanting to consume. The sudden cut | | provided by the black A4 envelope combined with a sharp shift in sound, breaks a pivotal moment where we could have either been:

Lured in and absorbed by desire or ...

Pushed away by embarrassment.



THE SICK ROSE invites us to plunge deeper into the interior and break through individuated and isolated ZOOM space into a shared conscious space. In the same way that sexual union can overcome duality; art, poetry and performance can connect us to shared consciousness, which is the role of the performer to facilitate. The CUT is a Brechtian device, waking us up from the story to realise the spell that is being conjured and drawing attention to the IMAGINATION itself.

The reflected fingers slip into the black envelope and an image of *The Ancient of Days* is pulled out like a rabbit from a magician's hat. Appearing like an invitation to an exclusive underground event or party, I am reminded momentarily of Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*; the same feeling of sexual tension and uncertainty that entices

us to step into dangerous places and unknown spaces in oneself.

This is an *Invitation* to Scene 3.

3. The Red Room.

The laptop camera is obscured and filled with the powerful image of the godlike Urizen, kneeling in a flaming disc. I am enabled to move to a new location in the corner of my living space (which contains the entire performance). Every movement animates Urizen: *He is quaking*

The Red Room is a familiar conceptual space in my work; an alchemical and physical container, cauldron or forge, which could also be characterised as the body. A space to explore themes of making, creating and

conjuring. Inspired by Blake's work as a printer and the **physical** processes involved in the relief etching technique he invented; illuminating and integrating poetic text with image. I wanted to evoke and show the labour, the work and the sweat required to **make art**. When I was developing this scene I researched alchemical symbols, magic and spells, and mused on the word spells in terms of incantation and mantra; the impact of reciting words and how language itself creates our reality. I was inspired by the powerful physicality of *The Ancient of Days*.

When considering the camera position for this scene I explored the potential for an overhead, God's eye view, as if from the perspective of Urizen looking down in judgement from above. Whilst dramatic tension and novelty would be well served from this viewpoint, the desire to evoke the earthy, sinuous physicality of Blake's work became more obviously dominant. Placing the laptop/camera at ground level for a 'mouse eye' view dictated the art direction and choreography in this scene; focusing on the feet and lower part of the body with a physical immediacy and proximity.

The Red Room is a workspace, a space of potential, a womb, a fiery forge, a place of embodied toil and effort; hands are seen scratching out symbols and letters with a decorative dagger, casting a salt circle, burning candles and incense, making offerings, feet stamp on the earth and step slowly around, pacing with intent.

In The Red Room there are:

- Musical instruments: ukulele, penny whistle, kalimba, kazoo
- Tools for measuring and making
- Photo of my dearest friend, writer Jill Miller, who died in 2019
- Postcard of feminist performance collective Trio De Femmes
- Bendy Santa Claus
- Ripe banana
- Red clown wig
- Red coffee pot
- 2-year-old yule log

The lower part of my legs are painted red; bloody looking and earthy, strong, almost masculine, heavy, root-



ed in the earth and physical work. I connect to Blake's work as a printer; the craft, the practice, the effort, the patience required in the process of making things.

The Red Room is place of industry, a human incarnation fleshy place. It is sexual, animal, primal and aggressive. The point of a dagger is shown, at first in extreme close up, distorting our sense of scale and it is then seen dangling between my legs, a suggestion of the masculine energy of action, a phallic symbol, a sword of truth. This is not a sleeping sword. The potency of the Red Room suggests a container where something might emerge;

an artist's studio an alchemist's cauldron Frankenstein's laboratory.

From effort and toil and sweat and persistent practice something is drawn out and shows itself. Practice and effort produce effortlessness, flow, ease, an invitation for something new to happen. This is what happens in...

4. The House of Death.

Moving inevitably toward Death... depicted not as the end, but the ultimate transformation and rebirth. For this final part I switch to the iPhone camera and shift to portrait mode; suggesting a doorway or passage.

The whole screen is filled with a white folding screen arranged in the shape of a corner. This is **The White Room**: empty void space or vacuum. I perform a *Dance of Death* teetering on the brink of life and after-life, balancing in the in-between, depicted by the two sides of the white screen/divider. It is my attempt to encounter or meet William Blake. Me, or my persona is seen on both sides of the screen; attempting to join Blake on the other side, rather than bring him back to life or call him back as a ghost by way of seance, ouija board or medium.

A more evolved approach to encountering Blake; to meet him in death. I mused on this over many weeks and months before and during lockdown. Through contemplation and meditation on Blake's images and words and through a **death practice meditation** I created, (inspired by the Tibetan book of the dead) Attempting to lose the artist ego mentality; that thinks itself creator and master and instead leaning back into surrender and trusting in a sense of merging with the essence of my relationship with Blake: a deeper non-verbal communion.

The White Room is the space of encounter, a liminal space that belongs to nobody. The white screen

arranged in a point to push the perspective and offer a sense of multi-dimensionality. The wooden frame of the screen creates a grid effect, a measured out background, framework or blueprint. It is a space to be mapped upon; like painter's squares on a prepared canvas or mathematician's graph paper for working out formula.

The white screen presents **a vortex**, a point that we are drawn towards. I move behind the screen and create ghostly shapes of human outlines; hands and arms and face coming toward and away from the screen. I momentarily peer through the centre of the screen, where there is a gap. I am able to see the image I am creating on the phone screen, standing on the tripod, and therefore able to orientate myself.

The ghostly hand shadows desire to make contact, coming closer and touching the papery surface of the screen and then retreating, **appearing and disappearing**. I watch myself and I am reminded of vampire movies. The vampire is flying outside in the dark night (like the *incredible worm*) knocking at the bedroom window, asking to be let in. My hands come around the other side of the screen, passing over from one world to the other, coming into full colour again. My arm

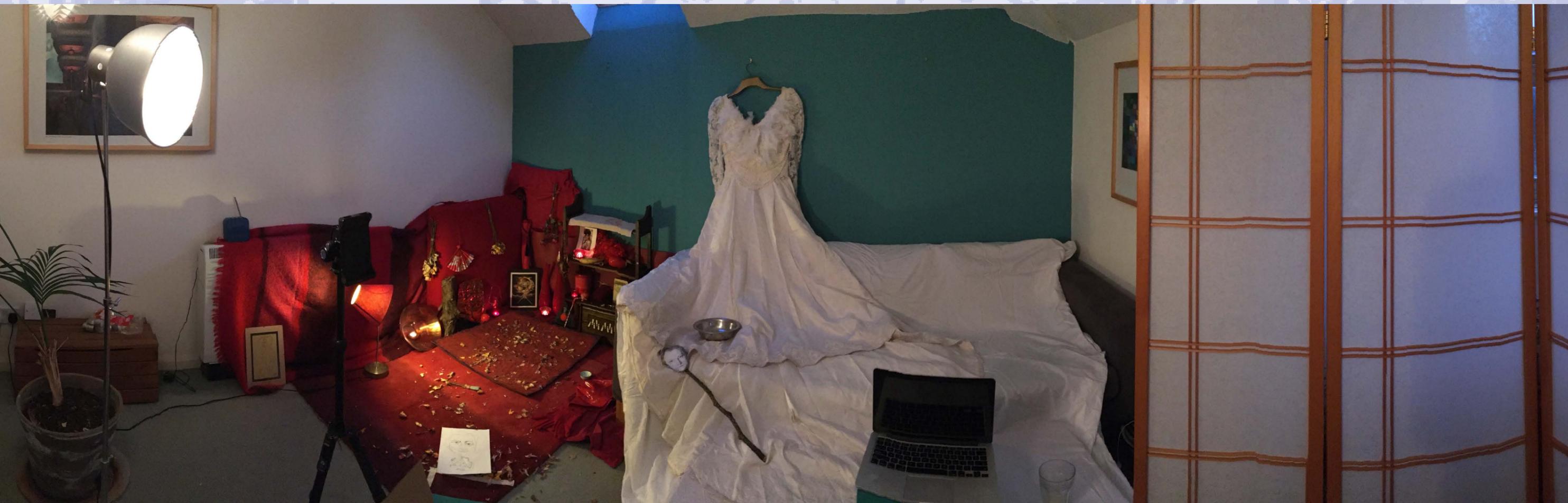
and hand appear in the frame; spiraling and floating hypnotically,

like a creeping vine or elegant snake.

The arm has a life of its own, as I watch it dancing in space, disembodied, light, feminine, seductive. The arm disappears and then reappears attached to a body and legs. My whole body comes into frame, my back to the camera. Now, I can't see my reflection in the camera screen, so I move responding to impulse and the music; Ana-Cristina's angelic vocals reprising words from 'The Sick Rose'. *The Sick Rose's* curtain call, the final blooming. I fill the space with my body and backbend to face the screen with an upside down face. This is the first time my face has been revealed to the audience. It is the white face of a Pierrot clown; androgynous, innocent, touched by tragedy.

In the backbend I reach my hands and extend toward the screen, distorting proximity and scale. Hands become giant and exaggerated. These are the aspects I find most exciting about the online space of performative expression; the sense of control over the scene space, proximity to the viewer and the space we occupy together.

We exist in a time of mediated intimacy...



People's Faces, in a World Upside Down: 21 December 2020*

Amy Weldon

'It's coming to pass. My country's coming apart.' These are the first words uttered by Kae Tempest in their poem 'People's Faces' (2019), which stands alongside William Blake's 'London' (1794) and Lord Byron's 'Darkness' (1816) in my British Romanticism undergraduate course one December day as prophecy and apocalypse and hope.

It's coming to pass. Struggling towards the end of this brutal year — two million COVID-19 dead worldwide, Brexit descending on the country Blake loved and chastened, wildfires burning up the West Coast, a defeated American president ranting that an election has been 'stolen' from him, and George Floyd murdered by a policeman on a Minneapolis sidewalk — my students and I wonder what exactly that *is, coming to pass, coming apart*, coming down the pike, slouching toward Bethlehem or Bedlam to be born in these bewildering days.

We hearken to the words of these three English geniuses and try to remember a fourth, George Orwell, who wrote that 'to see what is in front of your nose requires a constant struggle' (see Orwell 1946). We must believe that art will help us see the world clear, and keep our vision kind and active as we move into what is coming next. But it's a struggle, uphill, in the dark. 'My country's coming apart', Tempest muses. 'It's hard.' Especially for my twenty-one-year-old university students, just at the start of things, wondering what future will be left for them.

Blake hearkened to his interior vision, to the light of prophetic conviction that paints itself over the visible world and redirects us to what is and *might be*, and flipped and reversed what is in front of our nose to ask us to look again. 'As a man is', he wrote, 'So he Sees' (Letter to Revd Dr Trusler, 23 August 1799, E702). He looked at London and saw a new Jerusalem struggling to crack its carapace of suffering created by a Lear-like indifference to the way things are. He looked at St.

Paul's Cathedral and saw its white stone coated in soot and blood and the cries of Napoleonic War veterans and the curses of the 'youthful harlots' servicing their clients in its shadow ('London', l. 14, E27): synesthetically, all five senses merge and ripple and drop over 'Paul's' as a semi-translucent 'pall' of cloud, of shroud, dimming and darkening (l. 10, E27).

Seen with the spiritual eye, the mighty centre of Blake's great city becomes the 'black'ning church of Paul's' (say it and you hear the bitter pun). In Blake's printing method and in his imagination, the visible always becomes and contains its opposite: the raised engraving ridges on the copper plate become the shallow troughs of ink marks on paper, Innocence becomes Experience, Heaven becomes Hell (and that's a good thing). What is always becomes what might be, if we will look with our imagination as well as our outward eye. And it starts with beholding the page, and looking carefully. It starts with looking into 'every face I meet' ('London', l. 3, E26) and 'mark[ing]' (Blake loves that bitter pun, too) 'marks of weakness, marks of woe',



plunging through the visible into the imagined and the world that marks and remarks us every day (l. 4, E26).

On a subway platform in the twenty-first century, Kae Tempest joins hands with Blake to look into those faces and *mark* them, too. Together on Zoom, our Romanticism textbooks open on our individual desks, students and I cue up ‘People’s Faces’ and listen. ‘I saw it roaring’, Tempest says, ‘I felt it clawing at my clothes like a grieving friend’: this is the wind of the oncoming train, this is a cry or a curse blasting up the Fleet Street hill, this is the future always bearing down. And suddenly the face looked into is our own. ‘There is too much pretense here’, Tempest continues. ‘Too much depends on the fragile wages and extortionate rents here. We’re working every dread day that is given us, feeling like the person people meet really isn’t us.’

Tears rise to my eyes as I listen. I’m beheld by Tempest’s words as I’m beheld by Blake’s in my *weakness* and my *woe*, in my battles to be generous in a world of austerity tightening around my throat. ‘I stare out at my city on another difficult day’, pleads Tempest, ‘and I scream inwardly, when will this change?’ When will I take off my COVID mask and embrace another person again? When will I feel like I’ve taken enough care, worked *every dread day* to make myself safe enough? When I glance into the faces in their Zoom boxes onscreen — my dear students, twenty-one of them — I can see they’re sombre, they’re writing, and at least one of them is wiping her eyes, tear-redened like mine.

But it’s all right. Because this is what Blake and Kae Tempest and my whole course — ‘Romanticism for a World Upside Down’ — ask us to consider: if art can

crack us open like this, there is still hope for seeing and for acting on what we see. Byron, so outwardly different from Blake, offered a likewise bittersweet pun in ‘Darkness’: ‘a fearful hope was all the world contain’d’ (l. 18). Hope is all that’s left in the world. Hope contains the whole world within itself. ‘And yes, our children are brave but their mission is vague’, Tempest muses. ‘Now

If art can crack us open like this, there is still hope for seeing and for acting on what we see

I don’t have the answers but there are still things to say.’ And, wiping my eyes, I speak. ‘Thank you for today, y’all’, I offer. ‘I’m grateful for you.’

And Kae Tempest’s words are also mine: ‘My sanity’s saved ‘cause I can see your faces.’

*The date (21 December 2020) refers to when Amy was transcribing the lyrics of ‘People’s Faces’ from the audio recording on YouTube, to which she and her students were listening in the moment described. The poem was released as a spoken word audio piece on Tempest’s album *The Book of Traps and Lessons* (2019).

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Helen P. Bruder

GUYS WIDE SHOT

As everyone knows Blake is an artist passionately devoted to the joys and potency of vision. Quotations and images celebrating the power of our eyes are legion in his verbal and visual works. As he boldly tells us ‘the Eye altering alters all’ (‘The Mental Traveller’, l. 62, E485), perhaps because we possess the awesome capacity, ‘To see a World in a Grain of Sand’ (‘Auguries of Innocence’, l. 1, E490). Less considered, though, has been his wisdom about the motivations behind, and dire consequences of, deliberate choices not to see.

The affliction of chosen blindness is widespread but seems to especially assail the powerful big daddies of the Blakean cosmos. Urizen, ironically, foremost amongst them. The Urizenic books (*Urizen, Los, Ahania* 1794-95) body forth an awesome, teeming, universe, which Blake’s uber patriarch is driven to master, often successfully. But when it comes to intimacy and otherness nothing short of visual erasure will do:

Dire shriek’d his invisible Lust
Deep groan’d Urizen! stretching his awful hand
Ahania (so name his parted soul)
He siez’d on his mountain of Jealousy,
He groand anguishd & called her Sin,
Kissing her and weeping over her;
Then hid her in darkness in silence;
Jealous tho’ she was invisible.
(*Ahania*, pl. 2, ll. 30-37, E84-85)

When the feminine appears an explosive scatter-gun masculine response ensues: much violence, attempts at naming, sentimental emotion and — central here — shady eclipse. She’s all just too much. It makes your head ache. And in Blake’s language of art, so beautifully described by the much-missed Janet Warner (*Blake and the Language of Art*, first published in 1984), we regularly see stylised visual representations of this masculine pain, as guys clutch their heads and cover their eyes in desperation. Indeed, the frontispiece of Ahania’s own book is horribly representative and utterly mesmerizing. Giant Urizen stares earthwards, crushing his beautiful feminine other between his two meaty knees, whilst pitifully clutching both his and her hair... A Guy Wide Shut indeed....

This is a tragic and truly arresting image, but the old boy Urizen is far from unique. Just a year or so earlier we met Blake’s young master Theotormon, who on the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* frontispiece is terrifyingly muscular in his blind anguish. There is an enormous radiating eye behind the deadlocked trio, illuminating their awful drama, but Theotormon practically corkscrews his head off in a powerful effort not to see the sight of Oothoon’s abuse. Or perhaps it’s a gesture of refusal to see his role in it? Either way, as we move through to plate 7 we find him in total cognitive and sensual lockdown, sulkily self-closed with his head thrust into his hands as Oothoon floats imploringly above. But, she’s trying!

Silent I hover all the night, and all the day could be silent.
If Theotormon once would turn his loved eyes upon me;
How can I be defild when I reflect thy pure image?
(*Visions*, pl. 3, ll. 14-16, E47)

Rousing him to see is so crucial to Oothoon that she’s prepared to have her own ‘eyes [...] fix’d | In happy copulation’ (*Visions*, pl. 6-7, l. 23 and l. 1, E50) to purge

his moralism, and to go even further still, if he’d only join her. She’ll,

catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold;
I’ll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play
In lovely copulation bliss on bliss with Theotormon:
Red as the rosy morning, lustful as the first born beam,
Oothoon shall view his dear delight [...] (*Visions*, pl. 7, ll. 24-28, E50)

There have been many decades of volcanically heated debate about how to weigh and measure Oothoon’s wild, visual, come-ons. Years ago, I offered many fierce contentions myself... (*William Blake and the Daughters of Albion*, first published in 1997) but what’s crucial and clear here is the stark gendering of vision, and of the willingness and desire to see. It may be pleasant or it may be unpleasant, but the feminised one is completely prepared to view it, unlike the young and old Wide Shut Guys. If Blake’s desire is to make us perceive more — which it is! — then we need to revision our sense of who his seers are. Take *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*’s famous and electrifying plate 14. Surely the uncomprehending, unconscious body is masculine, whilst the flaming visionary one is not?

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite.
For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern. (pl. 14, E39)

These are some of the most beloved and famous lines ever written by Blake. They are treasured by enthusiasts and academics alike and rightly so, because surely getting outside of our own heads to see more is, potentially, a cherished and universal human aspiration. Yet, just as Theotormon blinded himself to the multi-coloured bounty offered by Oothoon, the Blakean fraternity of lit-crit guys were comparably, and incredibly, blind and equally resistant to the bounty of what female scholars and feminist criticism could bring to what we see when we read and view Blake.

Nearly twenty-five years ago a shockingly feisty incarnation of myself blasted generations of bad boy Blakists for being in thrall to Urizenic-Theotormic blindness. The feminist revolutions of the 60s, 70s, 80s seemed to threaten their prized versions of Blake and I was incandescent about how they simply closed themselves off to what more there was to see and love about

Blake’s prophetic vision, if females and the feminine were perceived and valued. So I mused. Does much maligned Thel have very good reason to shriek in and out of the masculinist, milky Vales of Har? And could the Daughters of Albion be realistic and right to wearily and sadly ‘echo back’ Oothoon’s ‘sighs’ (*Visions*, pl. 5, l. 2, E48)? And on that horny, hot ‘hero’ Orc — is he also a ‘revolutionary’ force for women? It’s even also possible that Enitharmon’s, much condemned, gleeful thoughts about ‘womans triumph’ (*Europe*, pl. 12, l. 25, E64) have another less capricious side when viewed contextually. And so on. There’s no need to repeat all my historicist-feminist literary critical arguments! But it is very worthwhile, I think, to appreciate and apprehend just how long lived this strategy of deliberate critical blindness was.

A decade after my *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion* (1997) asked Blake’s blind guys to ‘lay down their pens’ (Bruder 1997: 183; old school writing!) I returned to scrutinise the state of play. Much, obviously and happily, had changed in the new millennium but there was still a potent tendency to nudge out or skate over female critics and the feminine other. In particular I noticed that when collections were put together to chart the critical landscape and guides were edited to invite outsiders into it, guys’ influential eyes were still wide shut (1997: xvii-xviii). This was troublesome and alarming, because if the outlines were badly drawn all perception would likely be wonky! A pretty serious problem... which needed a determined team effort, I thought. Though cleansing these critical doors wasn’t in any way a dismal experience. In fact, editing *Women Read William Blake* (2007) was delightful: connecting with and drawing together neglected female pioneers, youthful new voices, rarely heard international scholars, as well as some very famous girls! Germaine Greer and Tracy Chevalier certainly brought heft to our visionary efforts (chapters 2 and 10) — amazing!! Indeed, the editor of this journal entered my Blake life during that enterprise, which was a great, and clearly long-lived, joy.

And now, almost a decade and a half later still, there are even more reasons to smile. In both our culture and our Blake Society, 2021 is a time when ‘sexual garments’ can be ‘sweet’ (*For the Sexes*, l. 25, E268) because there’s the chance to change them, to choose them. Which not only offers the hope that Wide Shut Guys will open their eyes, but also brings about the opportunity for the rest of us to see them differently too. As you can see, I have! So, now, rather than feeling shut out from the priapic ecstasy of Blake’s *Milton* self-portrait I feel able,





as a middle-aged lesbian, in these transformed and freer times, to enter into his self-wrapped joy. Indeed looking again at that most aggressive line-drawing guy, the great Ancient of Days (from the frontispiece of *Europe*), I can, today, revalue and revision his boundaries as beautiful and whimsical, as well as definitive. Because if his perspective is understood as just one of many perspectives it's easier to see it and to love it but not exclusively privilege the lines he draws. I/we can value his industry, but now also see the man who's making his marks. So

2021 is a good, visionary, time! If all eyes are liberated, then Blake's adoration of vision is truly vindicated.

I also sense a lethal bullet dodged, because Blake is equally brilliant at showing the malign uses that invisibility can be turned to. Think about *Jerusalem* plate 10 and the work of the deadly spectre,

I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another
Mans
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Cre-
ate

So Los, in fury & strength: in indignation & burning
wrath
Shuddring the Spectre howls. his howlings terrify the
night
He stamps around the Anvil, beating blows of stern
despair
He curses Heaven & Earth, Day & Night & Sun &
Moon
He curses Forest Spring & River, Desart & sandy
Waste
Cities & Nations, Families & Peoples, Tongues &
Laws
Driven to desperation by Los's terrors & threatning
fears

Los cries, Obey my voice & never deviate from my
will
And I will be merciful to thee: *be thou invisible to all*
To whom I make thee invisible [...]
(*Jerusalem*, pl. 10, ll. 20-31, E153; my emphasis)

Just as choosing not to see can be a disastrous Wide Shut Guy's power play, deliberating hiding your worst self can be too. Blake is brilliant at showing his workings, and even as his majestic *Jerusalem* devotedly and painstaking tells Los's story it is also unflinching about his many (un)visionary strategies. As we see here, men conceal their worst selves when they need to do their most destructive work.

It's not an exclusively masculine strategy though. Much further into the saga we find Blakean females using erasure in multiple and terrifying ways, from the very dense plate 80,

Hyle on East Moor in rocky Derbyshire, rav'd at the
Moon
For Gwendolen: she took up his bitter tears his an-
guishd heart,

That apparent to all in Eternity, glows like the Sun in
the breast:

She hid it in his ribs & back: she hid his tongue with
teeth
In terrible convulsions pitying & gratified drunk with
pity
Glowing with loveliness before him, becoming appar-
ent

According to his changes: she roll'd his kidneys round
Into two irregular forms: and looking on Albions
dread Tree,
She wove two vessels of seed, beautiful as Skiddaws
snow;
Giving them bends of self interest & selfish natural
virtue:
She hid them in his loins; raving he ran among the
rocks,
Compell'd into a shape of Moral Virtue against the
Lamb.
The invisible lovely one giving him a form according to
His Law [...]
(*Jerusalem*, pl. 80, ll. 66-79, E237-38; my emphasis)

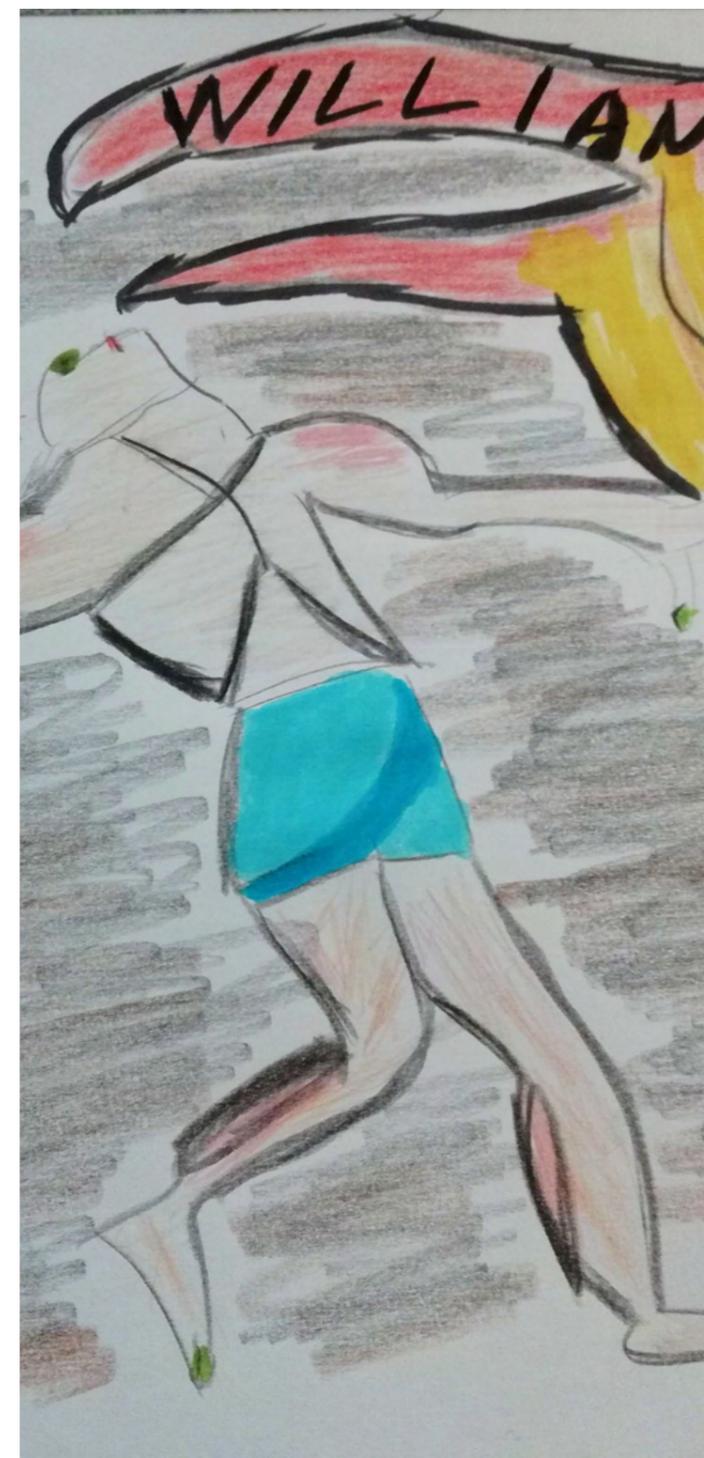
It's pretty much impossible to summarise this revengeful endeavour. Somehow for me it brings to mind the recent *Invisible Man* (2020) movie, where Elizabeth Moss is terrorised by a monstrous techno-savvy partner, who creates a reflective hi-tech suit through which to secretly abuse her. The end of which could have been cinematically tragi-lethal, and it's certainly a bad enough watch. But now, beyond the era of Handmaids and female victims, she ultimately dons his once-masculine carapace and takes utter revenge: slitting his throat at the very table he'd set for their make-up supper. As Blake, perhaps, put it,

Here Vala stood turning the iron Spindle of destruc-
tion
From heaven to earth: howling! invisible! but not in-
visible
(*Jerusalem*, pl. 66, ll. 10-11, E218)

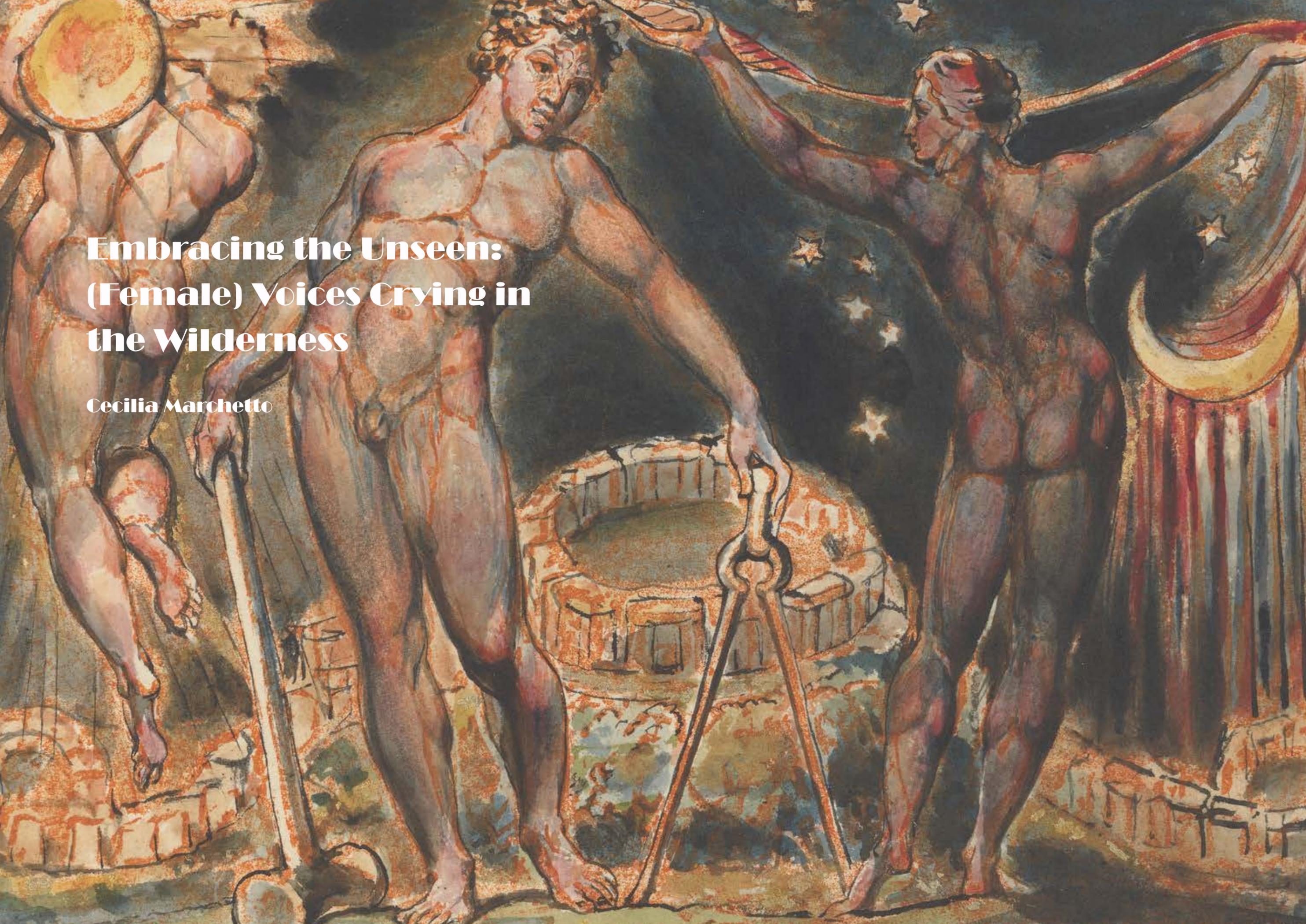
Girl's revenge is understandable. It's a legitimate response to the kind of unbearable assault Ahanian, Oot-hoon and many other female, and feminised, characters experience. BUT Blake repeatedly warned the Guys Wide Shut to open their eyes, OR ELSE. And that's another golden reason to treasure his work, now.

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**Embracing the Unseen:
(Female) Voices Crying in
the Wilderness**

Cecilia Marchetto

Did Blake feel invisible? At certain moments he surely must have, striving in vain to connect with the public through illuminated printing. He seemed to want to turn his invisibility into invincibility, as he imagined other unacknowledged artists struggling to create, to change realities: 'Painters! on you I call! Sculptors! Architects, [...] (Milton, pl. 1, E95). No matter that their names would be unknown, their contributions would live on in the eternal work in progress: 'To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating' (Milton, pl. 30, l. 20, E129). Did Blake have to transform his idea of poetic immortality into a quieter, anonymous mode of artistic transcendence?

Was embracing invisibility his antidote to despair?

Such a transformation must have been hard. Blake was not at all an enthusiast of mystical mystery.

His very ideal was

visionary, and therefore visual. His myths and stories are meant to be seen, in full technicolour. He was trying to render visible the inner worlds that we learn to turn a blind eye to when we need to survive in a world of single vision.

Most women, at some point, have felt invisible; this is commonplace in feminism. One would suppose that Blake's struggles would make him sympathetic to this condition. At some points he seemed to be. *The Book of Ahania* attests to this sentiment, when Blake shows her rendered invisible by Urizen:

7: Dire shriek'd his invisible Lust
Deep groan'd Urizen! stretching his awful hand
Ahania (so name his parted soul)
He siez'd on his mountains of jealousy.
He groand anguishd & called her Sin,

Kissing her and weeping over her;
Then hid her in darkness in silence;
Jealous tho' she was invisible.
(*Ahania*, pl. 2, ll. 30-37, E84-85)

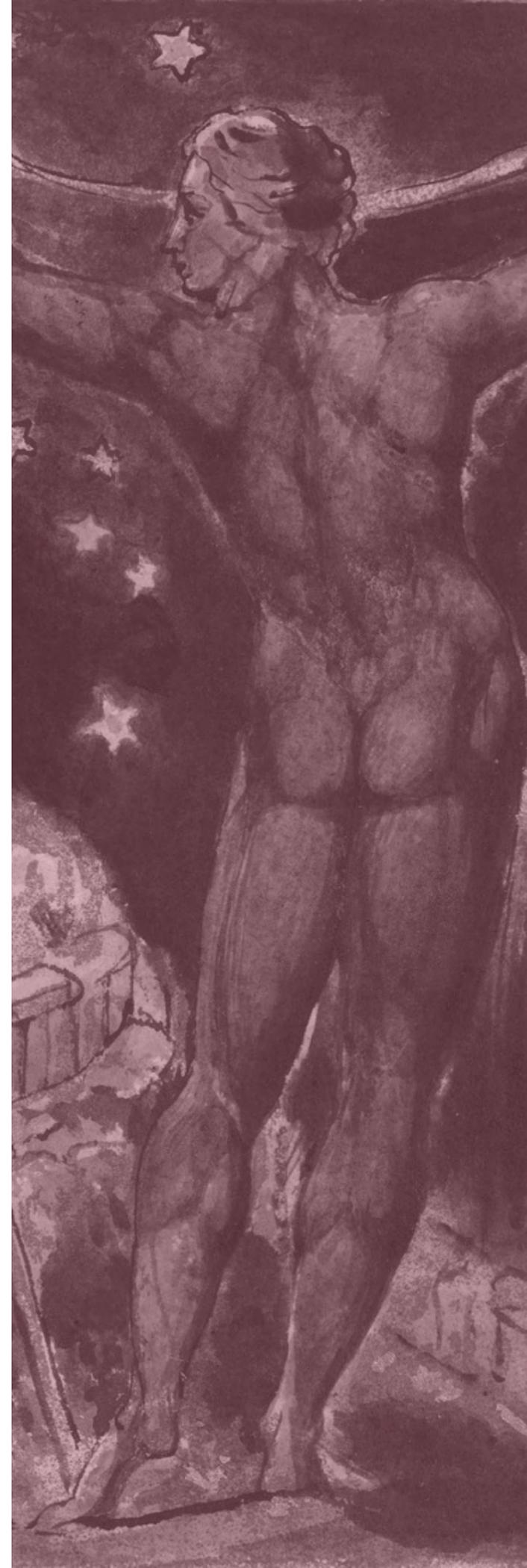
In Blake's imagery, female bodies are all but invisible. They dance under the sun, instead of remaining hidden behind cloaks of shame. At a later period, Blake's Emanations become invisible behind the radiance of the male Zoas. The more literal invisibility of Rahab or the Daughters of Albion in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem* seems to be a bad invisibility that seduces and confounds

male characters. We women students and researchers ask ourselves: was all that feminine visual exuberance just a treat for the male viewer after all? Can liberation be other than sexual for women,

or must the female efface herself to integrate into the male?

Many invisible female bodies in literary research, working ceaselessly towards academic and literary Eden feel crushed under the tyranny of superegoic, Urizenic scholarly demands (Levecque and others 2017: 875). Yes, we have received inspiration on the way; we have chosen this path consciously relinquishing other endeavours for long periods of time; and yes, we enjoy exploring mental worlds. We do not shy away from the hard work of reading and studying Blake. Yet must scarcity and insecurity be normalised in the way towards academic excellence? The struggle of young researchers, especially women, is invisible. We interiorise modesty to hide our shameful discontents; we do not want to be ungrateful towards supervisors, mentors and institutions. While we struggle with un- or underemployment,

The task of past visionary female critics and artists must continue, to rescue from single vision the invisible female bodies in Blake's life, poetry, art and illuminated books.

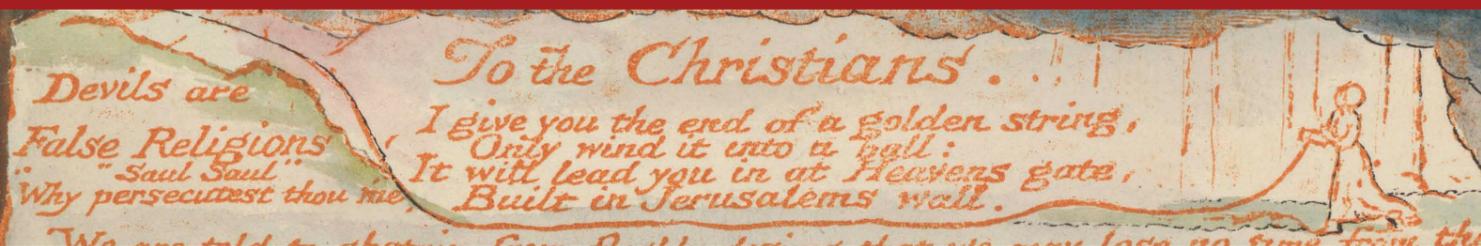


mental health issues, academic stress, and work-life imbalances, are academic authorities really doing everything they can for us, or are they worshipping the stony Druids of corporations and banks? When will governments stop defunding research? Instead, we are told to work for love, like housewives are, perhaps like Catherine Blake. We clean Blake's palaces of eternity, we protect and help (re)create his prophetic work. Three to five years or more for a Ph.D. thesis, of which only a portion is funded at all (in lucky cases like mine). While we welcome opportunities for publishing, and want to continue our labour, we feel we must always say yes to be good enough scholars. To prove our love is true. We work a double shift: mornings at home with Blake, evenings in other industries, often doing menial jobs in questionable conditions. It is no Beulah's mild moony repose. There are Emanations building Eden with the strong poets. They are just not seen.

We find a mirror in Blake's female figures, who begin battling towards creativity and freedom, but stumble, their efforts thwarted by unrealistic, unhealthy mandates. The task of past visionary female critics and artists must continue, to rescue from single vision the invisible female bodies in Blake's life, poetry, art and illuminated books. By speaking out and transforming perceptions in Blake criticism we might also change perceptions towards our own invisible selves.

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Jerusalem: Feminine Divine!

Susanne Sklar

Jerusalem herself, feminine-divine, may be 'the golden string' leading us into the heart of Blake's masterpiece. *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, adorned with gold, is now two hundred years old. Jerusalem — a city, a woman, and a way of life — is the great poem's heroine. She can guide us as we read.

In the poem's opening preface, William Blake tells us that every word and character has been chosen to suit 'the mouth of a true Orator' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 3, E146). *Jerusalem* is meant to be read and heard. The characters aren't merely human, like Miss Marple or Adam Bede; they're more like Shakespeare's Ariel or a superhero like Spiderman. Jerusalem can appear both 'Wingd with Six Wings' and as a labouring woman (pl. 86, l. 1, E244). William Blake may have created the first graphic novels.



Some critics think *Jerusalem* has no plot, but that's not true. It has overlapping plots, which become apparent when you cast yourself as a character. The main ones — Jerusalem, Albion, Los, and Vala — each have an important story, and sometimes their stories overlap in counterpoint. The story of Jerusalem, a woman and a city, is the story around which the others constellate.

Jerusalem is both the bride of Jesus and the Emanation of Albion, who is both an irascible 'Everyman' and the land of Britain. Through Jerusalem, Albion and all human creatures are connected to the divine; through Emanation psychological, political, ecological, artistic, erotic, and spiritual interconnections bring joy. But Albion, afflicted with Selfhood (akin to narcissism) negates and banishes any means of connection with others, with another, or with God. 'Jerusalem is not!' he declares, 'her daughters are indefinite' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 4, l. 27, E147).

As Albion contains Zoas and sons, so Jerusalem has sisters and daughters. Albion's misogynistic fury creates division and pain among both sons and daughters. Vala, being part of Jerusalem, suffers with her in the first plates of the epic, but soon becomes shadowy, manipulative, and bellicose, wielding the worldwide web of her toxic veil — after she and the other daughters get whipped through the streets by Albion's cruel sons. Shadowy Vala promotes Albion's violence and oppression, spreading a culture of war and materialist consumption called Babylon whose gates are 'the Groans | Of Nations' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 24, ll. 31-32, E169).

Jerusalem, on the other hand, orchestrates an economic system where wealth is rooted in beauty and imagination. Creativity enhances prosperity. The 'Lamb of God' walks in her 'Exchanges' (stock exchanges), fostering mutually beneficial global fair trade (*Jerusalem*, pl. 24, l. 42, E170). Peru and Tartary, Japan and Ethiopia: all come to Jerusalem with blessings. She has furniture, houses, curtains, gifts of gold and silver, all ancillary to the wonderful music created by each nation and culture. Turkey and Grecia (deadly enemies at the time) play together on flutes and mellow horns

(pl. 78-79, E233-36). Jerusalem's system is fair, both beautiful and equitable, untainted by the disease called Selfhood.

Unfortunately, Albion chooses to be seduced by Vala, who is Babylon. He knows he's unwise when he forsakes Jerusalem's way of being in the poem's first chapter. In the second, Jerusalem must be separated from Albion or she'll become as shadowy as Vala. Erin, a wise crone, manipulates space and time, removing Jerusalem (feminine-divine) from Albion's diseased bosom. And then, to quote *Paradise Lost* — all hell breaks loose in Chapter Three.

Los, the poem's tenacious hero, keeps building a structure called Golgonooza, a space where Jerusalem and Albion can be reunited, a space where nations and people might flourish. But when Jerusalem is severed from humanity and Britain, 'the roots of

Albions Tree' (the Tree of Selfhood and Moral Law) enter 'the Soul of Los' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 53, l. 4, E202). He and his work get corrupted. He becomes as furious and misogynistic as Albion, forcing the daughters to obey him. Spectrous Selfhood has severed him from Emanation.

'O Albion', Los cries, infected, 'why didst thou a Female Will Create?' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 6, l. 43, E206). 'Female Will' arises in response to the tyrannical abuse Albion and his Sons inflicted upon the Daughters in the poem's first chapters. 'Female Will' is symptomatic of Selfhood, and Selfhood can infect any character, filling them with fury, fear, or despair.

Though Jerusalem is banished, she descends to Cathedron's Looms, a division of Golgonooza, where women, hungry and abused, labour endlessly. In the din of those Satanic Mills, intrepid Jerusalem starts losing her mind. When Jesus appears to comfort her, she momentarily wonders whether he (who is her beloved) is just a delusion. She knows her doubts and fears aren't healthy; she knows she is a mess. Like Los, she keeps on labouring.

But by Chapter Four our heroine is in ruins. In one of the poem's longest speeches (*Jerusalem*, pl. 78, l. 31 to pl. 80, l. 5, E233-36) she moves from despair back to the time of love when she 'taught the

Jerusalem is both the bride of Jesus and the Emanation of Albion, who is both an irascible 'Everyman' and the land of Britain. Through Jerusalem, Albion and all human creatures are connected to the divine



ships of the sea to sing the songs of Zion' (pl. 79, l. 38, E235) and all nations honoured her, sounding Thanksgivings — except for America, whose fires have become corrupt. Firmly she lets it be known that 'patriarchal pomp' (pl. 79, l. 67, E235) is totally unacceptable, and she challenges Vala, who seeks to destroy her.

When Vala's poison cup is given to Jerusalem she ends up in the stomach of Satanic Selfhood's dragon. And then — as Los pulverises his own Spectrous Selfhood — she rises, golden and strong in plate 92, her hands outstretched in blessing. Jerusalem's rising is integral to Albion's awakening. (Many readers miss this because it's depicted only visually.) Jerusalem's ordeal has changed her body. She's no longer gentle and slim. She is strong.

It is the voice of the Emanation that raises Albion from his sleep of death in the epic's last scene. When he rises all fallen characters are redeemed, conversing together 'in Visionary forms dramatic' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 98, l. 28, E257). Every character expands outward in sensual joy, and as all interconnect, identity is heightened. Each is unique and each is connected to all in the name of Jerusalem. 'even Tree Metal Earth & Stone' (pl. 99, l. 1, E258) dwell in that divine name, a name of power, like the name of the Lord in Psalm 124. Could Jerusalem, I wonder, be Blake's depiction of the Holy Spirit? In Revelation, Blake's favourite Biblical book, the Spirit is the Bride, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22), offering life and forgiveness to all who can hear.



Reflections on the Dark Feminine in Blake and Jung

Carol Leader

For nearly thirty years, I have been drawn to the work of William Blake and Carl Jung. I have found, in their different but complementary perspectives, illuminating handholds to grip onto as I, and the people I work with, have struggled with bringing the inner unconscious and outer conscious processes of the psyche into a creative partnership. Both Blake's and Jung's views posit the inevitable psychic splits that emerge as a variety of inner personalities demand imaginative union. Blake's passage from single/sensory to four-fold vision and Jung's concept of individuation have been vital route maps on this journey. For this I feel lasting gratitude. But increasingly I have found myself unable to ignore two things: firstly, their injunctions that each person must find their own experiential and imaginative solutions to facing life's truths and secondly, the fact that both men's visions of the dark aspects of the feminine are skewed in the direction of a male view.

Blake wrote, 'I have represented it as I saw it. To different people it appears differently, as everything else does' (*A Vision of The Last Judgment*, E 554). Through his character Los, he tells us that he has to create a system or be swallowed up by those of other men. Jung dislikes the idea of 'Jungians' and instructs his readers to 'dream the dream onwards and give it a modern dress' (Jung 1959a: 160). It seems vital therefore, no matter what our sexual orientation or gender, to resist falling into the his-

torical and social limitations of pre-formed androcentric narratives. This requires individual labour rather than relying too intensely on these giants of the psyche.

Blake and Jung, in their different ways, stress the need to resist the unconscious and therefore dark, mysterious and unstoppable aspects of Mother Nature that resides in all of us. She is represented by the veiled Vala, the 'Female Will' and the Dragon Females in Blake's mythology, or the negative Mother Complex or Dark Anima in Jung's contribution. For both men, the biological role of Mother needs to be challenged and separated from. And, although their actual mothers were clearly very different, each also had a profound impact on their sons and their work.

Separation for Blake is achieved through the grace and individual development of human imagination leading to unified brotherhood. For Jung 'humanisation' leads to individuation and a richer interaction with collective life. Nature, left to its raw archetypal, instinctual state, has the power to possess and seduce in infantilising and repetitive ways that limits our perspectives. This can be seen in plate 47 from Blake's *Jerusalem*, where the seductive nature mother Vala pushes Jerusalem her daughter out of the way, claiming to be the true partner to Albion. However, this perspective splits off, rather than includes body and matter as a vital

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part of the mind. While Blake and Jung both support the emergence of a younger, liberated inner feminine in the form of Jerusalem (Blake) or the anima/soul (Jung), neither find solutions to Mother Nature, nor her daughters, that lead towards true equality in relationship with the female or with matter/nature.

In Blake's transformative vision, the feminine body, although vital as the emanation of the masculine, is there to be shared sexually. Ultimately 'she' will dissolve into the masculinity of Albion (Kaplan 1997). It is the feminine that will be swallowed up. The seeds for this

view may well have been informed by the fact that Blake's mother was a member of the Moravian Church that condoned both marital and extramarital sex on occasion — as a way of becoming

one with Christ. And Blake's writings about the dark feminine appear to relate not only to his inner visions but also to his increasingly conflicted sexual relationship with his wife Catherine. Sex, Blake felt, was a major pathway to spiritual enlightenment (Schuchard 2006) but there doesn't seem to have been the question about what a woman really wants (see Stephen 2007).

In Jung's world, his experience of the inner archetypal anima/soul, needed for deep connection with the unconscious, also dominated his experience with real women who ended up playing supporting erotic or child-bearing roles in his logo-centred spiritual life. Jung came to argue that the woman who had given birth to his children could not be the same woman who inspired creative psychological and 'anima' work. Thus, to the considerable anguish of his wife Emma, with whom he had five children, Jung insisted on her acceptance and recognition of his mistress and inspiratrice, Toni Wolff. This split view of women is not untypical but cannot be disconnected from the fact that Jung's mother spent disturbing periods away during his infancy in a mental institution. He experienced her as often mercurial and uncanny. He also retained a powerful visual memory of being looked after sometimes by a dark-haired young

maid servant who seemed very strange yet strangely familiar (Jung 1968). She, according to Jung, came to form part of his anima, a part presumably split off from the more frightening, overpowering experience of his mother. Jung would later write eloquently that 'Nothing exerts a stronger psychic effect upon the human environment, and especially on their children, than the life which the parents have not lived' (Jung 1966: 4).

The conflation of the inner feminine and the internalised mother with real women, leads inevitably to shadow-filled projections onto women in a restrictive

way for everyone. The Mother carries us all to birth and is nearly always the first external carer — the first attachment figure. But attachment is very different to mature love. Women can end up carrying the weight of working

through, for a partner, an unconscious denigrating and inflated response to Mother or Muse, rather than finding mental space to explore for themselves the power of the feminine with all of its symbolic meanings. This is what Jung's patient, Christiana Morgan tried to do.

But Jung, in his famous Vision Seminars used only some of the inner visions of Christiana to confirm his male-centred construction of universal individuation, where the man as hero needs to kill the mother dragon and rescue the new, vulnerable feminine. Following parallel lines with Blake, this leaves the feminine as an adjunct to the male. Jung did not seem able to recognise that Christiana did not need to kill the maternal dragon but incorporate and transform its raw power. Transcripts of these seminars hint at the omnipotent pronouncements that Jung sometimes makes, where he assumes the voice of his inner dark feminine — the dark anima — who feels she can sermonise about the nature of actual human women, thus keeping them from conscious development (Jung 1959b). We experience in these moments Jung possessed by an unconscious complex that pushes aside the conscious ego, as occurs with all of us at times. In Blakean terms we could see this as 'Jung in Error', becoming aspects

The conflation of the inner feminine and the internalised mother with real women, leads inevitably to shadow-filled projections onto women in a restrictive way for everyone





of Blake's Vala, alongside those of Urizen, the inner patriarchal godlike 'Nobodaddy'.

Like Vala, the dark anima denotes an unconscious 'complex' that is driven powerfully by instinct, nature and genetics and that maintains a possessive rather than liberating, humanised sense of maternal attachment. Complexes are never to be trusted to speak with human authority and experience about anything that might rock their inner power and certainty. They act as a primordial splitting defence against feelings that are vulnerable to human interactions (see Kalshed 1996).

My clinical experience has taught me that the Dark Mother complex is almost impossible to dialogue with and appears at crucial times as part of the analytic process with most men and women. The Mother, like all complexes, is evident from its bipolar nature and an intensifying of the emotional atmosphere. She can often be identified through the patient/client speaking with a different tone of voice. This can be of real help for the analytic partnership in exploring what is happening in the consulting room — and in real life! Here, in psychoanalytic terms is the working of the transference. Patience and restraint are required to avert constant battles with her and respectfully let her have her say without taking her pronouncements too literally. Later these incidents can be taken up as powerful examples of what may be causing difficulties in relationships in real life. Similar remarks could be made about the appearance of

the presence of Urizen or the dark negative Father, but space constraints do not make this possible here.

After several years of running his Vision Seminars (Jung 1997), Jung's patient requested that he stopped using her powerfully painted images of her inner visions. In her analysis with Jung, Morgan had come to feel that Jung had plundered her unconscious knowledge and colonised it for 'a man's world' rather than consider that a woman's inner visions might be revealing a journey that was not necessarily linked to those of a man. According to Douglas (1993), whose research included the detailed notes Morgan made on her analysis, 'Neither (Jung's) understanding of women's psychology, nor his conflicted attitude towards his own mother, nor the era itself could allow for a truly autonomous woman [...] he instructed Morgan to live her life very much in the same way Toni Wolff lived hers — as adjunct to and in the service of her lover' (Douglas 1993:150).

However, it would be a mistake to counter this state of 'error' with immediate opposition rather than reflection. Contemporary Jungian thinking points to the dangers of becoming too gender specific. It is important to recognise the destructive and creative relationships personified in our dreams and fantasies by both inner feminine and masculine elements. This prevents a cycle of repetitive splitting off of knowledge into a primordial either/or mental state. I think that Blake perceived this with his Urizen and Vala and his commitment to

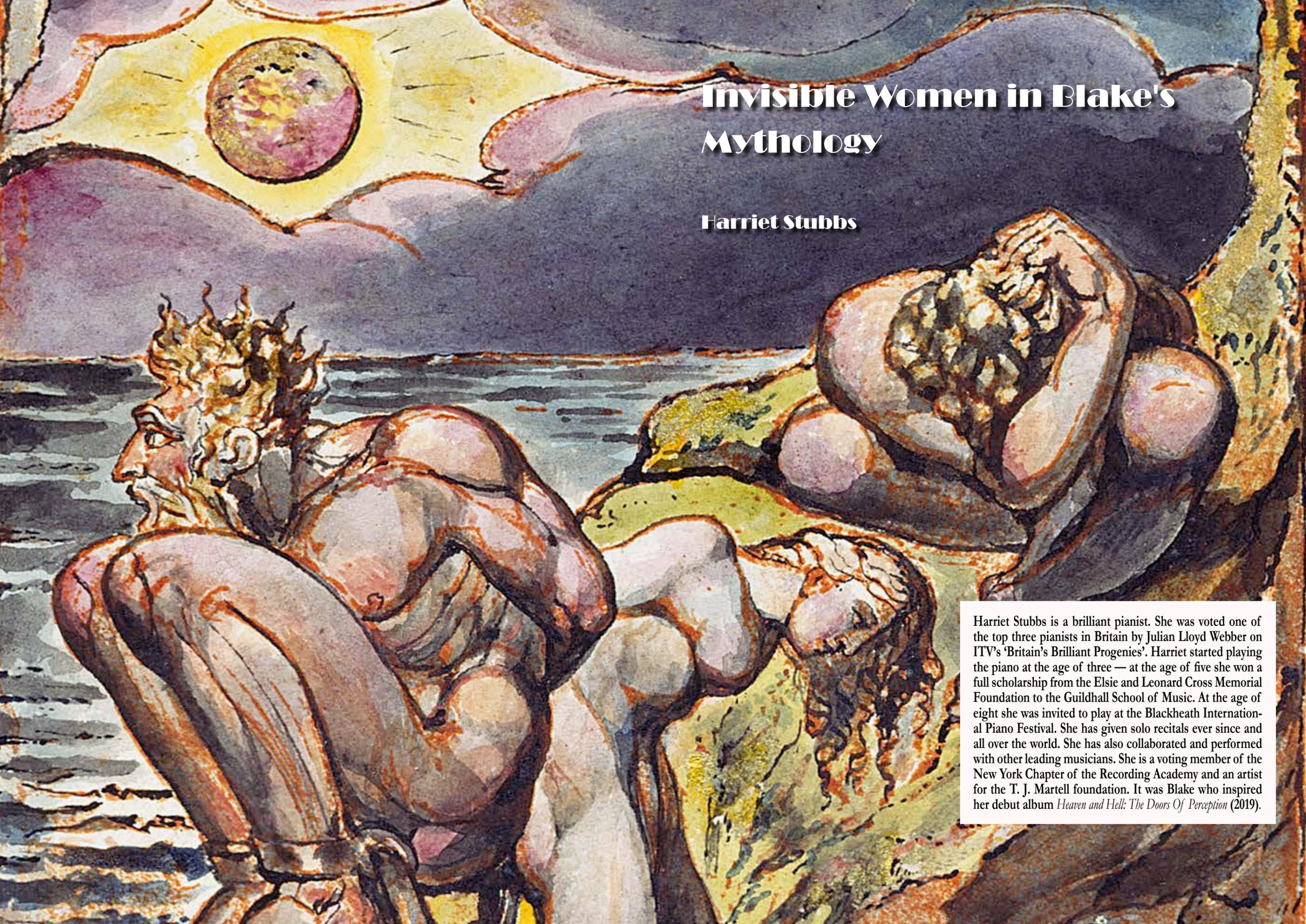
contraries rather than oppositions. These inner characters offer visual images as well as words that enable us to recognise and take responsibility for the inevitability of unconscious 'error' and the human need to expand our perceptive abilities. This requires the necessary suffering of the workings of the contraries in order to activate the continual resurrection of human imagination. In Jungian terms, this is the transcendent function springing into life and producing new living symbols for every culture and historical age through the bringing together and tolerating conscious and unconscious processes in the mind.

I have come to believe that symbols of expanded equality are the dynamic agency needed to face the dark and deathly inner and outer attacks of our troubled times.

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Invisible Women in Blake's Mythology

Harriet Stubbs

Harriet Stubbs is a brilliant pianist. She was voted one of the top three pianists in Britain by Julian Lloyd Webber on ITV's 'Britain's Brilliant Progenies'. Harriet started playing the piano at the age of three — at the age of five she won a full scholarship from the Elsie and Leonard Cross Memorial Foundation to the Guildhall School of Music. At the age of eight she was invited to play at the Blackheath International Piano Festival. She has given solo recitals ever since and all over the world. She has also collaborated and performed with other leading musicians. She is a voting member of the New York Chapter of the Recording Academy and an artist for the T. J. Martell foundation. It was Blake who inspired her debut album *Heaven and Hell: The Doors Of Perception* (2019).

Within Blake's mythology, I believe that there are invisible women from Blake's life that inform and influence his female characters.

Catherine Blake and Mary Wollstonecraft, the feminist, author and fellow radical, as well as Catherine and William's stillborn child, I think, are woven into the fabrics of Blake's mythological women in order to give them what they did not get in real life; perhaps also to present differently their individual and collective tragedies; or sometimes even for Blake to address his own shortcomings in interacting with them.

The juxtaposition of real and mythological women, in our thinking about Blake's life and works, creates the duality of 'real' and 'fictional'; this adds another layer to the duality in Blake's writing which means that for me the core of Blake's message is about duality. The gaps between Heaven and Hell, Emanations and Zoas, Good and Evil, Life and Death, Innocence and Experience allow what is normally invisible to manifest. The women in Blake's mythology are less visible than a living breathing woman, unless we know that they are there.

They exist as ghosts.

An invisible Catherine and Mary give depth and truth to all of Blake's mythological women. Duality and visibility seem to me part of the same idea and so I want to explore their co-existence, using S. Foster Damon's *Dictionary* as my guide.

Much like Plato's realm of perfect forms and Jung's archetypes, Blake's Eternals remain the only fully unified entity and sit outside of Time and Space. The duality in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and the states of Innocence, Experience, and Higher Innocence (my understanding of post Experience in Blake's journey), displayed in *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, are yet more layers that raise questions about what is visible and what is invisible in Blake.

Lyca in 'The Little Girl Lost' and 'The Little Girl Found' can be seen as a representation of the soul or Jung's anima in her journey from Innocence to Experience and on to Higher Innocence.

Lyca wanders through the wilderness alone as the soul (which I feel she somewhat represents in a Blakean hybrid with Jung) and has a task to perform in the world of generation, as an innocent child, to enter Experience.

'Lovely Lyca lay' ('The Little Girl Lost', l. 12, E20) and the 'beasts of prey | Come from caverns deep' (ll. 34-35, E20-21) yet as the 'kingly lion stood' (l. 37, E21), the 'Leopards, tygers play' (l. 41, E21) before the 'lioness, | Loos'd her slender dress, | And naked they convey'd | To caves the sleeping maid' (ll. 49-52, E21).

Lyca has been taken by the lion; like Persephone carried by Pluto, the Greek mythological ruler of souls, Lyca is carried to Ulro in Experience. Lyca's parents are 'Fill'd with deep surprise: | And wondering behold, | A spirit arm'd in gold' ('The Little Girl Found', ll. 34-36, E22) as they realise that they no longer need to be troubled, and I think, though this is not made explicit by Blake, that she will be safely living between Beulah and Eden in a cyclical rotation similar to reaping and sowing. This would be like living in Golgonooza, where I think Lyca should live.

A marriage of contraries, a higher state of Innocence where no one is harmed and where the desert wild has become the garden mild.

The AABB structure and the imagery of the plate further support this balance. The plate features a couple kissing, birds flying, and vines climbing.

Within the poem, all imagery is of nature and harmony, which in turn emphasises a feeling of equilibrium throughout the verse.

Lyca's education in Experience and the essence of nature, led her to Higher Innocence. This messaging feels influenced by the values of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Mary Wollstonecraft felt that children ought not to be shielded from life's most difficult questions — mortality, kindness and cruelty, the meaning of mercy, and the interplay of good and evil.

Mary's personal philosophy was very much in line with Blake's understanding of Innocence, Experience, and Higher Innocence, and both Blake and Mary held similar thoughts about equal education and sexual liberation.

At the time Mary would have been aware of Rousseau's *Emile, or Treatise on Education* (1762), which focused on the education of boys and reflected an attitude that women are to be educated only in order to make desirable wives and conversation companions for their husbands.

*Mary is known affectionately now
as the mother of feminism*

In 1792, Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which developed out of her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), written in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

In 1793, Blake wrote the character of Oothoon in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. To me Oothoon is a direct line to Mary's plight.

Mary is known affectionately now as the mother of feminism; like Blake she was very much before her time and only appreciated later. Much like Oothoon, Mary suffered endless tragedy.

Mary did not feel particularly compelled to participate in the institution of marriage, and both she and Blake shared principles of free love. However, Mary did fall deeply in and out of love, much to her detriment. Here, the truth of myth becomes visible; and as Blake himself says, 'Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth' (*Marriage*, pl. 8, l. 38, E37). So, the invisible women and mythological characters are one and the same.



Mary Wollstonecraft faced issues regarding her own abandonment and it feels to me as though Oothoon is in sympathy with Mary's personal tragedies. Once Mary had published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she went to Paris to seek like-minded people who would understand her vision amidst the French Revolution. Mary wanted to see France first-hand and was indeed welcomed into an international group of literary and political writers, including Helen Maria Williams (the English poet), Joel Barlow (an American patriot and political writer), Thomas Paine (the revolutionary she had met in London) and the French revolutionary leader Brissot, who would eventually be guillotined.

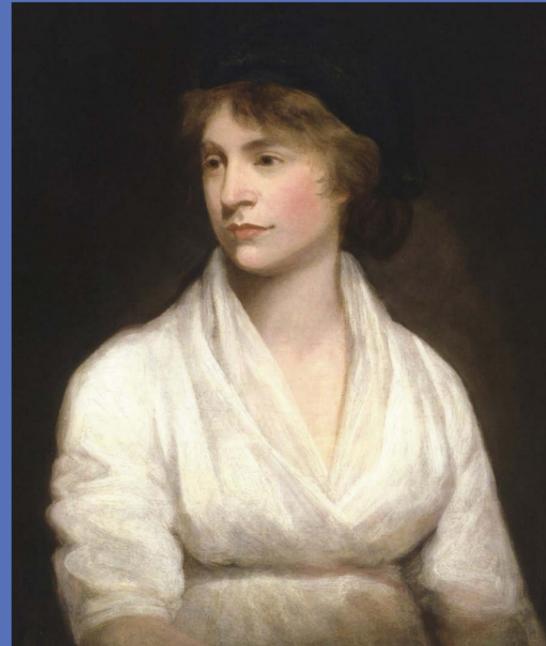
Whilst enduring the loss of Jacques Pierre Brissot and the collective pain of France's inability to emerge from its totalitarianism with dignity, Mary was already grieving humanity and fighting to reaffirm her inherent optimism.

Mary writes in *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*: 'Yet I feel confident of being able to prove that the people are essentially good [...] Out of this chaotic mass a fairer government is rising than has ever shed the sweets of social life on the world' (1795: 33).

Immediately after this, Mary was embroiled in a three-year relationship with an American patriot and novelist, Gilbert Imlay, with whom she intended to have a permanent (if not traditionally married) union.

Mary was called Mrs Imlay in Paris and London by many. They had a child, Fanny, who Mary largely raised alone, because Imlay was always chasing money and women.

Mary loved her child and delighted in motherhood, but wished that it could be done with the stability and harmonious domesticity depicted in her *Vindication*. When Imlay openly moved in with another woman in 1795, Mary, already abandoned in motherhood and economically struggling, found this too much to bear and the only option that she felt was available to her was suicide. Leaving instructions for the care of Fanny, she leapt off



Putney Bridge.

Mary was rescued before drowning by a passer-by and shortly after married William Godwin, with whose child she was pregnant.

Mary died of septicemia as a post-childbirth complication from bearing her second child, Mary, who would go on to form her own lasting legacy; for she is known to us today as Mary Shelley, the celebrated author of *Frankenstein*.

Mary's struggles were present in Blake's consciousness as he envisaged his mythological heroines. Mary and Oothoon embody the themes of abandonment and tragedy.

Vindication received hostility in conservative England for the author's progressive ideology. Mary was called a 'hyena in petticoats' and a 'man-hater' with penis envy and even accused of having an erotic love for her mother! Amongst these rather odd insults was the declaration that she was a 'philosophizing serpent' (Morales-Ladrón 1998: 53)

Even feminists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries chose to exclude Mary for her supposed lack of piety. It was not until the twentieth century that she was widely heard and revered.

In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Oothoon makes the descent into Experience and suffers, bitterly lamenting like Debussy's Melisande, that on earth, the laws are not those of the spirit.

She is the 'soft soul of America' (*Visions*, pl. 1, l. 3, E45); she speaks of 'trees beasts and birds' (pl. 4, l. 15, E48) and is at one with nature.

Oothoon is in love with Theotormon, who is filled with a false sense of righteousness. Oothoon is raped suddenly and violently by his brother Bromion. Theotormon represents desire and jealousy, whilst Bromion is a slave owner and represents scientific thought as he calculates that Oothoon's value will increase if pregnant. Yet in this action he acts in blind rage and entitlement: 'Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north & south' (pl. 1, l. 20, E46).

Theotormon does not want anything to do with her because he is filled with jealousy despite Bromion's command to 'marry Bromions harlot, and protect the child | Of Bromions rage, that Oothoon shall put forth in the nine moons time' (pl. 2, ll. 1-2, E46).

Oothoon's sacrifice is so great that she cannot even cry; 'she cannot weep! her tears are locked up' (pl. 2, l. 11, E46) and the Daughters of Albion 'hear her woes. & eccho back her sighs' (pl. 2, l. 20, E46). They, too,

are oppressed by the patriarchy, representing women in Blake's society who had no agency over their own sexuality. It is a sympathetic cry against the oppression of women and for the emancipation of the African slaves.

Bromion is clearly equating his possession of Oothoon's 'soft American plains' (pl. 1, l. 20, E46) with ownership of slaves in America, where the 'swarthy children of the sun' (pl. 1, l. 21, E46) 'are obedient, they resist not, they obey' (pl. 1, l. 22, E46).

Whilst the Daughters of Albion hear Oothoon's woes and echo back her sighs, in *The Four Zoas* Ahania's daughters, who were once the 'children of light' (Letter to William Hayley, 23 October 1804, E756), fall and gain human form, creating the 'bread of Sorrow' (*The Four Zoas*, 'Night the Seventh', p. 79, l. 23, E355). Ahania herself, having been taken to hear Enion's wailing by Los and Enitharmon, has a vision of a dark future and enters 'The Caverns of the Grave' (*Notebook*, l. 1, E480) in despair. This is not the only moment where Blake sees separation and pain as symbiotic with the Fall and the state of being human.

Enion's wailing in particular is so powerful as to bring about madness and apocalypse as she sings of her loss of Innocence. Los and Enitharmon use Enion's wailing to separate Urizen and Ahania.



One layer of women's duality is their existence as Emanations.

The our Zoas (males) have Emanations (female counterparts) and are a result of the division of the primordial God/Man union formed of Albion and his Emanation, Jerusalem.

Tharmas is God the Father, sense and unity of the body, according to S. Foster Damon's *Dictionary*, and his Emanation is Enion, who represents sexual urges.

Luvah is the Son of God, love, the heart, a man of feeling who later manifests as Orc — his Emanation is Vala (nature).

Urthona is the Holy Ghost, imagination and the loins, who later becomes Los — his Emanation is Enitharmon (inspiration and pity).

Urizen is the fallen Satan, reason, the head — his Emanation is Ahania (pleasure).

Much as Oothoon was abandoned by Bromion and Theotormon, in *Jerusalem* the eponymous character is banished by Albion, who blights nature, culture and his own internal life in the process. Jerusalem mourns and is then assaulted by Urizen's rationality. Los encourages her sons to banish her as well.

Jerusalem works in the Satanic Mills, where, infected by industrial chaos and Albion's morality, she can barely perceive Jesus or divine forgiveness.

This draconian attitude towards female visionaries and religious attribution to women's sexual activity resonates in the word 'harlot' (*Visions*, pl. 1, l. 20, E46) and language used towards Oothoon for her suffering as well as in Urizen's casting out of Ahania for being

This draconian attitude towards female visionaries and women's sexual activity resonates in the word 'harlot' and language used towards Oothoon for her suffering

the manifestation of sin in *The Four Zoas* and *The Book of Ahania*.

Ahania represents pleasure of the mind and is the goddess of wisdom.

Ahania and Oothoon are characters who — in an oppressive society — are 'bad' women, much like Mary.

Mary reveals herself in Ahania as she gains a sexual element when she goes through Experience, which is then combined with her representation of intellectual desire. Both Ahania and Oothoon are 'fallen' women, as Mary was considered in her own time. She left for France in order to be more accepted, as she was considered too radical in the UK. Blake is making the point through these characters that wisdom and pleasure are to be celebrated and that nothing good comes from suppressing them. I believe these characters are Blake's sympathetic nod to Mary.

In *Milton* and *Jerusalem* Blake acknowledges his understanding of this hypocrisy when Enion (sexual urges) falls because of the idea of sin, even though she is the earth mother and has the power to generate the world.

The last invisible female in these reflections is the character of Thel, central figure of *The Book of Thel*.

Thel loves the lotus flower, music and the spring, but is unable to accept their transience. She laments to the Lily of the Valley, who seeks the council of the little Cloud. Thel does not want to be the food of worms when she dies, but the Cloud explains:

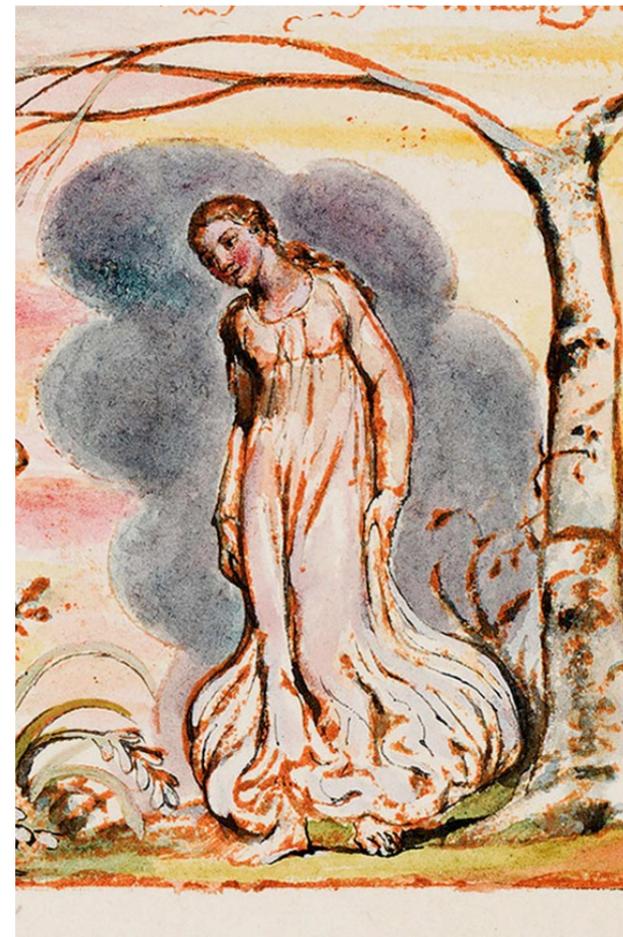
Then if thou art the food of worms. O virgin of the skies,
How great thy use. how great thy blessing; every thing that lives,
Lives not alone, nor for itself
(*Thel*, pl. 3, ll. 25-27, E5)

In *The Book of Thel*, the 'Queen of the vales' (pl. 2, l. 12, E4) and 'The Clod of Clay' (pl. 4, l. 7, E5) — to me, Catherine/Enitharmon with her pity and comfort — take Thel to the eternal gates to see the secrets of the land of Experience.

Thel sees her own grave, hears the voices of sorrow and shrieks, leaving unharmed into 'the vales of Har' (*Thel*, pl. 6, l. 22, E6).

Thel chose to live in Innocence forever and thus could never be brought into the mortal world. Arguably, Thel was already dead (if Heaven were to be interpreted as the 'vales of Har') and that is why the child never came into the world. She did not want to experience Life, because she was so happy in Heaven.

And so, in each mythological female there are gifts given to them in Blake's mythology that were not available to them in life as they knew it, and throughout a recognition of the injustices that they all faced.



Mary's binding to her captors in life is metamorphosed by Bromion and Theotormon's acknowledgment of Oothoon's suffering.

The restorative power of nature is particular to the Emanations.

Enitharmon uses nature to heal and show benevolence, as when she recreates Vala within her heart in 'Night the Fifth' of *The Four Zoas*.

Vala represents nature and is from the heart whilst being the Emanation of Luvah. In her fallen aspect she is the Shadowy Female. She melts with Luvah, and Tharmas tells her that her sinning has caused the Fall of others.

Urizen uses Vala to destroy Jesus and in her fallen state she represents revenge and jealousy.

When Los enters Albion, Vala is bloodthirsty but is worshipped and melded with the rational beast. Vala is redeemed in the Final Judgement and joined by Albion through forgiveness, whilst allowing for a union between mankind and the divine.

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Blake and Gender

Susan Matthews

'Gender' is an invention of the twentieth century, important to second-wave feminists who drew on psychiatrist John Money's terms 'gender role' and 'gender expression', and to activists of the twenty-first century, who have been fascinated by psychoanalyst Robert Stoller's 1966 concept of 'gender identity' (Hausman 1995: 7-15). Today we can't agree on what gender is. Is it deep inside ourselves or outside in society? Is it a set of social rules or the place we express our authentic selves (Stock 2021: 37-40)? In 2021, we are still far from a definitive answer to any of these questions. So why do we think that we can read gender in a poet and artist born in the mid-eighteenth century?

One answer is that we are in the habit of re-reading Blake to burnish his status as prophet, discovering something new, timely and apposite each time. Peter Marshall's *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (1988; repr. 2008) speaks 'at the beginning of the twenty first century' to people who 'are turning to a libertarian alternative' (Marshall 1988; repr. 2008: 11). (Charmingly, the ISBN takes you — in true anarchist fashion — to a work titled 'Another Dinner is Possible' by Isy Morgenmuffel and Mike Home Brew). John Higgs's 2019 *William Blake Now: Why He Matters More Than Ever* finds Blake in sympathy with Extinction Rebellion and definitely not a Brexiteer.

I start, then, with a warning: we don't know what Blake thinks about 'gender' because he doesn't have the

concept. We do know that Blake doesn't like enforced beliefs, as, for example, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790):

I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning (pl. 21, E42)

We also know that 'Opposition is true Friendship' (pl. 20, E42). With those cautions, I offer the following propositions — or questions.

1. The human form is androgynous/not gendered/has no gender identity

We are told that the 'Human Forms identified' at the end of *Jerusalem* (pl. 99, l. 1, E258) are above the 'Sexual Threefold' (pl. 98, l. 11, E257). But does this mean

that 'human form' (whatever that is) escapes sex or gender? Blake's visual language works with sexed bodies but does so in a way which confuses categories: the soul, in the illustrations to *The Grave*,

is female, while the body is male. Categories are complicated still further in the poetry. Take for example this statement: 'As the Soul is to the Body, so Jerusalem Sons, | Are to the Sons of Albion' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 71, ll. 4-5, E224). What does it mean to say that the Soul is

We don't know what Blake thinks about 'gender' because he doesn't have the concept. We do know that that Blake doesn't like enforced beliefs

the son of the female Jerusalem whereas the Body is the son of the male Albion? In *Milton*, Ololon is a river, then perhaps a company of eternals, and then a twelve-year-old virgin.

And what are 'Sexual Garments' in *Jerusalem* where 'Man in the Resurrection changes his Sexual Garments at will' (pl. 61, l. 51, E212)? Are these sexual partners, sexual orientations, gender identities or sexed bodies? The context suggests a rejection of moral labels: the following line tells us that 'Every Harlot was once a Virgin: every Criminal an Infant Love!' (pl. 61, l. 52, E212). Moral categories ('Harlot', 'Virgin') are forgotten in eternity: Ololon only becomes a 'Virgin' when she/they descend to Blake's garden (pl. 61, l. 37, E212). This is the mistake of 'Imputing Sin & Righteousness to Individuals' (pl. 70, l. 17, E224).

2. The body has a binary sex

'[T]he critic must be a fool who has not read Dante, and who does not know a boy from a girl' (Letter to the Editor of the *Monthly Magazine*, undated, E768), says Blake, writing in defence of his friend Fuseli to the *Monthly* in 1806. Blake's visual language (and his poetry) is populated by sons and daughters, male and female bodies, even though he does not exaggerate sexual difference as Fuseli does. It's true that the appearance of the 'female form' in *The [First] Book of Urizen* is greeted with horror:

In pangs, eternity on eternity
At length in tears & cries imbodyed
A female form trembling and pale
Waves before his deathly face
(pl. 18, ll. 5-8, E78)

But the materiality of the body, made from 'Fibres of blood, milk and tears' (*Urizen*, pl. 18, l. 4, E78) is unmistakable. Gestation mirrors the ascending forms of animal life, insisting that human bodies belong to the animal world:

Many sorrows and dismal throes,
Many forms of fish, bird & beast,
Brought forth an Infant form
Where was a worm before.
(pl. 19, ll. 33-36, E79)

Urizen's attempt to deny the materiality and the animal-

ity of human identity brings these qualities into sharp focus before our eyes. Perhaps the 'trembling', 'pale' and 'deathly' (pl. 18, ll. 7 and 8, E78) character of the female body is the consequence of modern life: according to Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue* 'naked civilized men' would have shown 'The flush of health in flesh, exposed to the open air, nourished by the spirits of forests and floods' (E542). By contrast, 'a modern Man stripped from his load of cloathing [sic] [...] is like a dead corpse'. That is why 'Rubens, Titian, Correggio, and all of that class' represent men 'like leather' and women 'like chalk' (E545). If so, the problem derives from the conditions

of modern life rather than the sexed nature of the body.

What of the consistently negative figure of 'the hermaphrodite' in the late writing (*The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*, *Gates of Paradise* and *Annotations to*

Thornton)? What do phrases like 'A terrible indefinite Hermaphroditic form' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 89, l. 3, E248) or 'Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 29, l. 28, E175) mean? Blake scholars tend to allegorise these passages in reference to religion and empire, to social disorder and monstrosity (Rosso 2016). Certainly if Blake were referring to people born with intersex physiology or DSDs (differences/disorders of sexual development) we might justifiably complain about the cruelty of these images. Perhaps instead we should read the 'hermaphrodite' in terms of (what we might now call) gender roles. The 'dark Hermaphrodite' in *Jerusalem* (pl. 64, l. 31, E215) is a dangerous conglomeration of two gendered stereotypes: the malign form of femininity represented by Vala and the malign form of masculinity represented by the Spectre. When they are combined together, they enable corporeal war:

Then the Spectre drew Vala into his bosom
magnificent terrific
Glittering with precious stones & gold, with Garments of blood & fire
He wept in deadly wrath of the Spectre, in self-contradicting agony
Crimson with Wrath & green with jealousy dazzling with Love
And jealousy immingled & the purple of the violet darkend deep
Over the Plow of Nations thundring in the hand of Albions Spectre
(*Jerusalem*, pl. 64, ll. 25-30, E215)





3. Altering the corporeal body does not turn it into a spiritual body

According to the Voice of the Devil in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 'Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses. the chief inlets of Soul in this age' (pl. 4, E34). The body appears here to be subsumed within the soul. But what does this mean? Is this something like Judith Butler's assertion that there is no body outside of discourse, no reality we can access outside a framework of belief? Perhaps. But Blake attaches a positive meaning to the 'soul' or to the 'spiritual' which is lacking in Butler's Foucauldian model. And the body, Blake thinks, can be 'discern'd by the five Senses' rather than being a discursive construction lodged in the brain. Blake insists on the distinction between the mental and corporeal — as in the contrast between 'mental' and 'corporeal war' in *Milton*. The confusion — or misreading — of the two categories has dire consequences, as when 'the Druidical age' began 'to turn allegoric and mental signification into corporeal command, whereby human sacrifice would have depopulated the earth' (*Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 41, E543-44). Blake's vision of the spiritual body is not realised through 'corporeal command' (p. 41, E543) but through imaginative creation; Blake adds in parenthesis '(For Vala produc'd the Bodies. Jerusalem gave the Souls)' (*Jerusalem*, pl. 18, l. 7, E163). The spiritual (or psychological or imaginative) infuses and gives meaning to the body.

4. Identities are social and not individual

John Barrell argued that both Blake and Milton use the word 'individual' to mean 'undivided; not to be parted

or disjoined' (a definition found in Johnson's dictionary) (Barrell 1986: 242). Eternity splits in *The [First] Book of Urizen* when a 'dark shadow' attempts to separate from the collective to become (what we would call) an 'individual'. The result is 'A self-contemplating shadow' (*Urizen*, pl. 3, l. 21, E71). In *The [First] Book of Urizen* this primal act of individuation comes not from pain but from a fear of pain:

I have sought for a joy without pain,
For a solid without fluctuation
Why will you die O Eternals?
Why live in unquenchable burnings?
(pl. 4, ll. 10-13, E71)

According to Blake, dysphoria is part of being human. There is no stable place where we can find 'a joy without pain' because we are a collection of fluctuating feelings. These feelings remind us of our shared existence. Blake writes in *A Descriptive Catalogue* that 'we see the same characters repeated again and again, in animals, vegetables, minerals, and in men; nothing new occurs in identical existence' (E532). He is curiously uninterested in the individual.

5. Children do not have a privileged access to an 'authentic self'

The 'notion of the naturally developing (Anglo-American) child began taking hold in the writings of reformers and educators in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century' (Sadjadi 2019: 113). This is a child with an authentic self which is pre-social. We know that Blake explores intergenerational conflict and

the family romance that seeks to bind the young within the ideas of the old. The 'Little Girl Lost' (who inspired Philip Pullman's Lyra in *His Dark Materials*) resists her parents' caution and takes her own path. But this figure has taken on new meanings in the twenty-first century. In the US west coast, the Romantic child has been reframed within a culture which understands the soul (or identity) in terms of gender to produce the 'transgender child' who can access a gendered soul "[...] deep down where the music plays" (Meadow 2011: 740). Californian psychologist Diane Ehrensaft believes that gender feelings are 'rooted in complex biological factors that exist at birth' (2011: 533). The task of the parent, according to this belief system, is to decode a child's 'gender signals' — expressed through signs such as the action of undoing the poppers of a Babygro.

In his annotations to Joshua Reynolds's *Discourse on Art* Blake says that 'Man is Born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown This World is too poor to produce one Seed' (E656). But the seeds of knowledge which come with us into the world are not the germs of gender identity. The two-day old baby of 'Infant Joy' from *Songs of Innocence* has no access to language: the poem explores the co-creation of identity through feeling and relationship. Perhaps it is the mother's joy that is projected onto the child, and perhaps she speaks the second stanza. But there is no authentic self, only shifting feelings:

I have no name
I am but two days old.—
What shall I call thee?
I happy am
Joy is my name,—
Sweet joy befall thee! (E16)

When children speak in Blake's writing, they do so within social languages which shape their identities. Alan Richardson thought that 'the little black boy has been in the hands of missionaries, or well-intentioned masters, or a Sunday school' (Richardson 1990: 242). The Chimney Sweeper of *Songs of Innocence* has already absorbed the class-based values of contemporary philanthropy (Richardson 1989). This child can only tell us 'So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm' (l. 24, E10).

Blake's vision is social rather than individual. The community of possibility imagined in eternity, which allows access to male and female brain characteris-

According to Blake, dysphoria is part of being human. There is no stable place where we can find 'a joy without pain'

tics, cannot be made real without the social alteration that Blake describes as the construction of the new Jerusalem on earth. Albion is man, nation, and world; Jerusalem is woman, city and poem. The poem ends with the embrace of Jehovah and Jerusalem, in a moment of relationship not identity. Blake does offer us a model of an innate and universal androgyny, what we

might now call a non-binary identity. But this is part of human identity rather than a marker of the special few. Blake describes 'Four Mighty Ones' who are 'in every Man' (Blake indicates that he is quoting from John XVII, see *The Four*

Zoas, 'Night the First', p. 3, l. 4, E300). 'Every' is the key word here.

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Unity in 'The Divine Image'

Robyn Pierce

Much has changed in the wake of the global pandemic. National lockdowns have driven us inside and confined our interactions to those within our 'bubble' or immediate household. Trips to the supermarket or to get coffee have acquired new significance as we live our lives behind screens conversing with the digital facsimiles of friends, family and colleagues, attempting to continue with the daily life of work and school.

This situation, which has aggravated pre-existing inequities and put pressure on interpersonal bonds, prompted me to reconsider the vision of humanity and the ethical imperative that Blake presents in 'The Divine Image' from *Songs of Innocence*. This is because the peculiar events of the past year have reaffirmed the fundamental ways in which our lives are bound up together, despite any socially constructed divisions, since the virus is undeterred by political or ideological barriers.

The vital importance of human cooperation and social interaction has also become sharply apparent in a world dominated by phrases such as 'essential workers' and 'social distancing'. However, what has also become very clear is how pre-existing social divisions, such as those relating to race, class, and gender, have exacerbated the adverse effects of the pandemic for

certain groups of people. Although no one has escaped its impact, everyone is not equally affected or equally placed to manage the resulting challenges. This sense of simultaneously asserting humanity's shared experience and interdependence while revealing the divisions and inequalities that cause disunity is also evident in Blake's poem. This is apparent not only in the differences that

'The Divine Image' wonderfully expresses Blake's radical call to recognise a shared divinity animated 'within the human breast'

Blake identifies in his society, such as those arising between 'heathen, Turk, or Jew', which he reunites in his vision of the divine image, but also in the patriarchal perspective the poem adopts in affirming the divinity of 'every

man' ('The Divine Image', l. 18 and l. 13, E12-13).

'The Divine Image' wonderfully expresses Blake's radical call to recognise a shared divinity animated 'within the human breast' as explored further in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (pl. 11, E38). Here, Blake reconnects the seemingly abstract divine virtues of 'Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love' ('The Divine Image', l. 1, E13) with their human bearers on Earth. These traditional Christian virtues are rightfully cherished because they form the basis of any just human community, but rather than reflecting a separate spiritual ideal, Blake shows that these virtues are manifested only in embodied human experience. In this way, Blake emphasises the interconnectedness of people within a society as a result of their

bodily situatedness within a shared world, as well as the ways in which the divine aspect of the human image calls us to be in service to others.

This sense of physical involvement and mutual dependence has been highlighted by the circumstances of the pandemic. Communities around the world have been urged to assume a shared responsibility in keeping each other safe, since curbing the spread of the disease requires a coordinated effort. Furthermore, the network of human relationships that sustain our personal well-being have become more apparent following the disruptions caused by social distancing and the migration onto digital platforms, underscoring the inherent strangeness of attempting to function outside of physical human connection. This is similar to the problem that Kae Tempest discusses in *On Connection* (2020), where they consider the difficulty of maintaining collaborative relationships in a world that frames success as an individual climb to the 'top' and which is increasingly invested in image and online 'presence'. While the internet can certainly facilitate connection, it also fans the flames of egotism, fear and disinformation. Tempest also wisely reminds us that online spectatorship cannot replace the full depth or immediacy of in-person participation.

In coming to the issue of gender in the poem, the use of patriarchal language in describing a universal humanity ultimately prompts the question previously asked by Diana Hume George: is she also the divine image? Feminist critics have noted a tension in Blake's work, in which his progressive advocacy for female sexual freedom and his notion of a unified androgenous self is in contrast with his gendered mythological system that foregrounds the male poetic genius. Anne Mellor has

convincingly shown that 'in Blake's metaphoric system, the masculine is both logically and physically prior to the feminine', but has also rightfully asserted that 'in Blake's New Jerusalem male and female functions converge harmoniously in total mutual fulfilment' (Mellor 1979: 154). This tension suffuses 'The Divine Image', since the narrative voice both absorbs the female within a male-centric 'human form divine' and presents an image of harmonious interdependence. It is necessary to recognise the patriarchal perspective of Blake's poem, which he inherits from a Biblical tradition, and to be mindful of the gendered divisions within the mythological system he creates. However, Blake's divine image ultimately imagines a wholeness of body and spirit that includes male and female in a unified vision of reciprocated virtue. As such, the poem works both to emphasise the call for collaborative unity occasioned by the pandemic and to highlight the divisions or inequities that nevertheless persist in our communities.

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Enitharmon slept,
 Eighteen hundred years: Man was a Dream!
 The night of Nature and their harps' unstrung:
 She slept in middle of her nightly song,
 Eighteen hundred years, a female dream,
 Shadows of men in fleeting bands upon the winds:
 Divide the heavens of Europe:
 Till Albion's Angel smitten with his own plagues fled with his bands
 The cloud bears hard on Albion's shore:
 Filled with immortal demons of fury:
 In council gather the smitten Angels of Albion
 The cloud bears hard upon the council house; down rushing
 On the heads of Albion's Angels.
 One hour they lay buried beneath the ruins of that hall:
 But as the stars rise from the salt lake they arise in pain,
 In troubled mists overclouded by the terrors of struggling times.

The Invisibility of the Female Body

Joanna Natalia Kowalczyk

I am really charmed and inspired by Romantic poetry, and I usually use poems in my art.

I love a kind of a darkness and mystery in Romantic poems.

I was inspired by the poem 'The Sick Rose', where the speaker addresses the rose diseased by the worm. Because in the poem the worm destroys the rose's vitality it reminded me of the destroyed vitality and innocence of the female body in the modern world. I am sure that this 'invisible female body' issue is a hot topic all around the world. I live in Poland now, where female issues are a current topic of public discussion and the worm-destroyer from the poem can be seen in figures in politics and other public speakers. Not only men but also women who see themselves as an authority on how the female body should be seen by the public and what is the proper role of all women in society.

In the picture you can see the young woman floating on the water, whose naked body, partially covered by transparent silk, is slowly absorbed by the water and by the invisible worm. Actually, the key to this picture is anything that is unspeakable about this issue.

It is hard to explain with words, but the drowning female figure reflects my personal experiences and feelings.



'Desires of ancient times': Feminine Metamorphoses in Ovid and Blake

Silvia Riccardi

Daphne is one of the most iconic figures of feminine transformation into a plant in the Western tradition. By retelling the classical myths in anecdotal style, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have inspired a legion of artists in the fine arts ever since. In his version of Apollo and Daphne, the Roman poet conveys a tension between female chastity and male sexual desire, embodied by the nymph and the god respectively. Daphne flees the lustful ardour of Apollo in the wooded body of a laurel tree. In George Sandys's 1632 translation, the famous passage of her transformation in Book I (ll. 578–81) reads as follows:

Forth-with, a numnesse all her lims possest;
And slender filmes her softer sides inuest.
Haire into leaues, her Armes to branches grow:
And late swift feet, now rootes, are lesse then slow.
(Ovid 1632: 12-13)

Daphne's metamorphosis is qualified by progressive numbness and impediment. Her limbs, deprived of the power of physical sensation, become stiff. Her enrooting into the ground is contrasted with her ability to move with 'swift feet'. Overall, the passage evokes a sense of vegetative regression. Illustrations after the Ovidian myth, such as the one by Giulio Romano or the marble statue by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, emphasise the dramatic moment of Daphne's wooden imprisonment.

In William Blake's *America* (1793), one cannot overlook the similarities between the iconography of Daph-

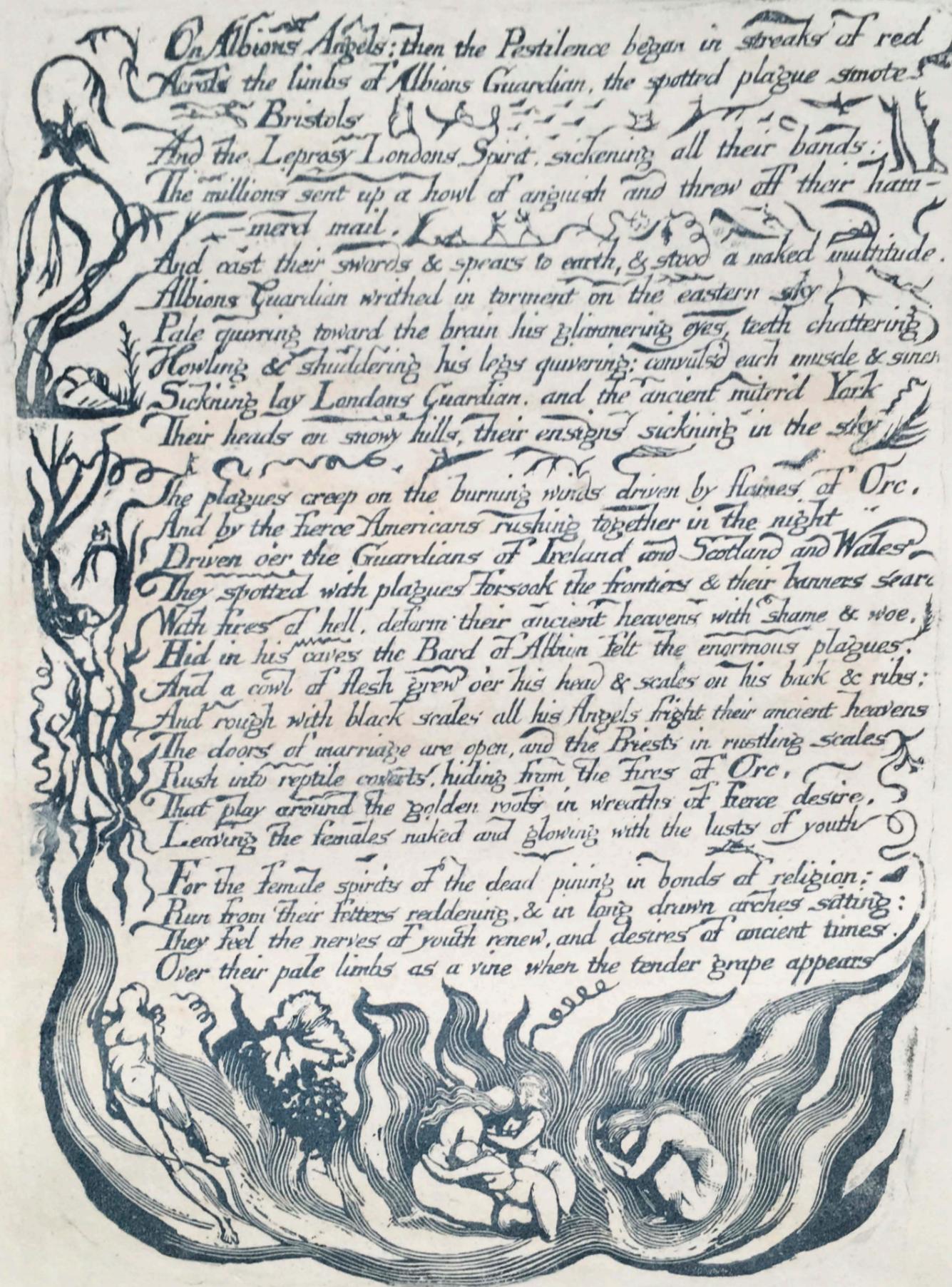
ne and the female figure morphing into a plant on the left margin of plate 15. The figure — what David Erdman calls a 'Daphne dendrifying' (1975: 154) — stretches upwards, extending herself in vegetative extremities. The process of growth is rendered through entwining patterns, which afford the development of feet into roots and arms into branches. The right limb becomes

a branch with a mother and her child blossoming from it. Although the implications of turning into a wooden body

seem intuitive, a consideration of the textual space in the same plate may highlight a layer of complexity within the trope of women morphing into plants.

America conflates revolution and sexual liberation in its written and designed forms. In plate 15 specifically, Blake's ideas develop around the emancipation from the bonds of the holy marriage:

The doors of marriage are open, and the Priests in rustling scales
Rush into reptile coverts, hiding from the fires of Orc,
That play around the golden roofs in wreaths of fierce desire,
Leaving the females naked and glowing with the lusts of youth
For *the female spirits* of the dead pining in bonds of religion;
Run from their fetters reddening, & in long drawn arches sitting:



*They feel the nerves of youth renew, and desires of ancient times,
Over their pale limbs as a vine when the tender grape appears*
(*America*, pl. 15, ll. 19-26, E57; my emphasis)

In the final two lines, Blake draws a significant analogy between nerves and vine built upon a visual association of the human nerves and the canopy of the vine, as they both develop in entwining patterns. The comparison presents a rich inferential structure thanks to the verb of perception to feel, which binds the female spirits' 'nerves of youth renew' with the vine, when its 'tender grape appears'. While the female spirits are markedly humanised by bodily parts such as 'nerves' and 'limbs', references such as 'tender grape' refer to a plant, the vine, which frequently appears in scenes of union and prosperity in Blake's prophecies. The concepts of growth and renewal are thus conveyed through the juxtaposition of human and vegetative parts onto the morphing female body.

As opposed to the Ovidian myth, this passage shifts the gender of sexual desire, where the lustful ones are the 'female spirits' and not a male god.

Instead of corporeal limitation, the analogy between spirits and plants emphasises the eruption of feminine desire and regeneration. Union and fertility is further grounded in the maternal scene on the branch and the infant to the left of the morphing body, which stands in stark contrast to the sterility implied in the *Metamorphoses*. The reader gains a sense of what it feels like to be sexually invigorated by means of a vegetative frame. A frame which atrophies and stiffens Daphne's body against the sexual pursuit of Apollo but that in *America* may take us toward a recognition of liberation over restriction — in Blake's words, 'youth renew'.

References and further reading

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The Lamb at the Gate

Diane Eagles

In 2020 I finished my project 'The Lamb at the Gate', a life-size ceramic lamb, a memorial to William Blake for his final resting place, incorporating elements from the earth removed during the setting of his new grave marker in Bunhill Fields. I presented an overview of the project in my talk following the 2021 Blake Society AGM. During the subsequent questions, I was asked, 'does the Lamb have a gender?' At the time, I was taken off-guard by this unexpected question, so I didn't feel I had a considered answer to it, but I now have an opportunity to share my thoughts more fully in this response.

The lamb is often referenced by Blake in words and images. Frequently the lamb is used as a symbol for the lamb of God, Jesus Christ, Agnus Dei, a lamb without blemish, holy, representing innocence and sacrifice. As a symbol the lamb has no gender, and yet the link to Jesus may place in our minds a cultural connection of God made man, his son. We may, therefore, project onto The Lamb the idea of male gender. Additionally, Jesus is the good shepherd, again often depicted in Blake's art. The shepherd is also the son of God, this time guiding and



leading his flock, keeping us safe and preventing our straying from the path, a male paternalistic projection. We are then the Lamb, vulnerable and in need of protection and salvation.

In the poem 'The Lamb', Blake uses a naïve format, incorporating curious questioning alongside an acceptant marvelling at creation, witnessing the divine in all of God's work. I see the mild and gentle lamb as joyful and peaceful, an innocent. Perhaps 'The Lamb' could be considered as pre-gender. We can imagine 'The Lamb' as a potential vessel for our most pure, divine, true, selfless, spiritual projections. 'The Lamb' becomes a way to unify the body and soul with a spiritual ideal, that of love, beyond gender, liberated and free, genderless.

'The Lamb at the Gate' is about striving to be as the lamb, being shepherded along a path, journeying to a point, the gate, a departure but also an emergence. The gate is a symbol for transition, a spiritual passage or transformation. The genderless 'Lamb at the Gate' may represent a way we can all be liberated and freed from the projections of gender. Perhaps the metaphor of a sacrificial lamb is a way we can all forgo our gender ideas, shed our beliefs, return to innocence, find acceptance and just be. Do we have to have a gender? Is it important? Or can we see beyond this to an inner spiritual self, unified, victorious and triumphant, beyond engendered connections and projections?



Reading the Swan-headed Riddle

Sharon Choe

When those of us curious — or brave — enough examine William Blake's illuminated books, we quickly discover that the relationship between the poetry and designs varies from being somewhat helpful to completely non-existent. Our immediate response to de-mystify Blake's poetry can sometimes become a continuous assigning of values to all parts of the illuminated books: from the presentation to the cast of ambiguous figures, and everything in between.

As readers it is a natural impulse, and yet there is something about this process that is counterintuitive. Blake's distrust in an ultimate,

fixed truth is evident in both his writing and the way he constructs his illuminated books themselves. Blake's deliberate inconsistency when delivering his work inevitably affects how we perceive the figures and narrative itself, but the woman-body provides a framework for approaching this challenging corpus.

Women in Blake have been a point of contention for both scholars and general readers alike. Their role and position within Blake's poetry have naturally been central to many gender and feminist readings. The discrepancy in their representation and the inability to affirmatively know why or how Blake utilises women becomes part of these larger discussions concerning the coherence of a Blake 'mythos'. But what if these inconsis-

tencies are designed to be left alone? The woman-body, as represented in both poetry and design, is a mode of intervention. Women rupture narratives. They interfere with our intellectual ability to process what is happening on the page, either by dictating the design of the plate or within the poetry itself. They embody Blake's dislike for a singular truth and his critique of the insistence on rooting everything in coherent structures.

All bodies and beings in Blake are obscure, but the woman-body seems to trouble readers even more. Take the Swan-headed Girl, for example. In Blake's final epic, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (c. 1804–20), she demands

our attention. She takes up almost a third of the plate with her elongated neck, neatly tucked wings, and the shadow of perhaps arms in the background. The lines below her recount Los's labours and the birth of Erin, yet there is no mention of her — or any swan maiden for that matter — here or elsewhere in the poem.

The Girl is conspicuously missing and is (in)visible to the reader. She epitomises the relationship between design and poetry in the illuminated books, one that promises to exist but only through disruption. Scholars have mused over who she might be or what she could represent. They draw answers from different myths or women from history, the most dominant interpretation being the Girl as a form of Leda from Greek myth.

Women rupture narratives. They interfere with our intellectual ability to process what is happening on the page, either by dictating the design of the plate or within the poetry itself



To labours mighty, with vast strength, with his mighty chains,
In pulsations of time, & extensions of space, like Urns of Beulah
With great labour upon his anvils, & in his ladles the Ore
He lifted, pouring it into the clay ground prepar'd with art;
Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems:
That whenever any Spectre began to devour the Dead,
He might feel the pain as if a man pin'd his own tender nerves,

Then Erin came forth from the Furnaces, & all the Daughters of Beulah
Came from the Furnaces, by Los's mighty power for Jerusalem's
Sake, walking up and down among the Spaces of Erin;
And the Sons and Daughters of Los came forth in perfection lovely,
And the Spaces of Erin reach'd from the starry height, to the starry deep

Los wept with exceeding joy & all wept with joy together:
They fear'd they never more should see their Father, who
Was built in from Eternity, in the Cliffs of Albion.

But when the joy of meeting was exhausted in loving embrace;
Again they lament. O what shall we do for lovely Jerusalem?
To protect the Emanations of Albion's mighty ones from cruelty?
Sabrina & Ignose begin to sharpen their beamy spears
Of light and love: their little children stand with arrows of gold
Nagale is wholly cruel Scofield is bound in iron armour!
He is like a mandrake in the earth before Reubens gate:
He shoots beneath Jerusalem's walls to undermine her foundations
Vala is but thy Shadow, O thou loveliest among women:
A shadow animated by thy tears O mournful Jerusalem!



As someone interested in the eighteenth-century movement of northern antiquarianism, I am personally more inclined to read her in relation to the Norse Valkyries. The temptation to acknowledge and hypothesise about the Girl and then quickly move on is attractive, especially since her appearance seems nonsensical in relation to both design and poetry. It is easier to relegate her to the edges of our reading, and perhaps also the more thorough scrutiny of other women-bodies in the illuminated books. However, her resistance to identification should not lessen her importance within the poem, nor should it undermine the fact that she does exist. Quite spectacularly as well.

Unlike some of the other women-bodies, the Girl is not marginalised. She directly meets the gaze of the reader, and in this way she is unapologetically present. Her hybridity as both girl and bird — graphically visible, yet textually invisible — embodies the internal incoherence of the illuminated books. She challenges us to identify her as anything but disconnected. By intervening in our reading experience, she asks us to accept that her body — her presence — is doing its job, much like other women.

Momentarily sidestepping the complexities of gen-

dered representation in Blake, women in the illuminated books are graphic and textual ruptures. Their roles are unashamedly provocative. They defy logic — a characteristic that is not just limited to women-bodies — but in doing so they carve out a space for themselves to merely exist. Approaching these figures should not be a question of what or who they represent, but why they insist on disturbing the status quo. Rather than worrying over their value as symbols and gestures, we must appreciate them for their confident interference which, ironically, opens them up to interpretation. This is also the key to reading the illuminated books.

It is highly likely that we will never know who the Girl is in the grand scheme of Blake's work, but this is no reason to discount her. Ultimately, her paradoxical nature as an (in)visible bird-human is still in line with Blake's philosophies and the general role of women in his poetry. While we should continue to interrogate and hypothesise how the women might fit into Blake's world, their value should never be undermined by our inability to categorise or fully understand them. At any rate, for the Swan-headed Girl, she will not be going anywhere. She is a riddle, much like the illuminated books themselves, and that should be enough.



Where are you O Luvah, why have you forsaken me?
Without your beams of light darkness englobes my poor weak heart.
Why do you aspire to the throne on the Parnassian heights
Wherefore have you relinquished me to be torn apart?

A darkness rises over me divided from my
Pitiful soul. He presides o'er my vegetable brain
Confounds me with perplexions dire, drains up my life force
Leaves me a husk lost in Abstract thought writhing in pain.

Awake Luvah, awake. From your sleep of eternal death
Come back to your glorious seat upon my bosom
Shine your bright light into the recesses of my soul
Bring me back from the bottom of the sea of time and space

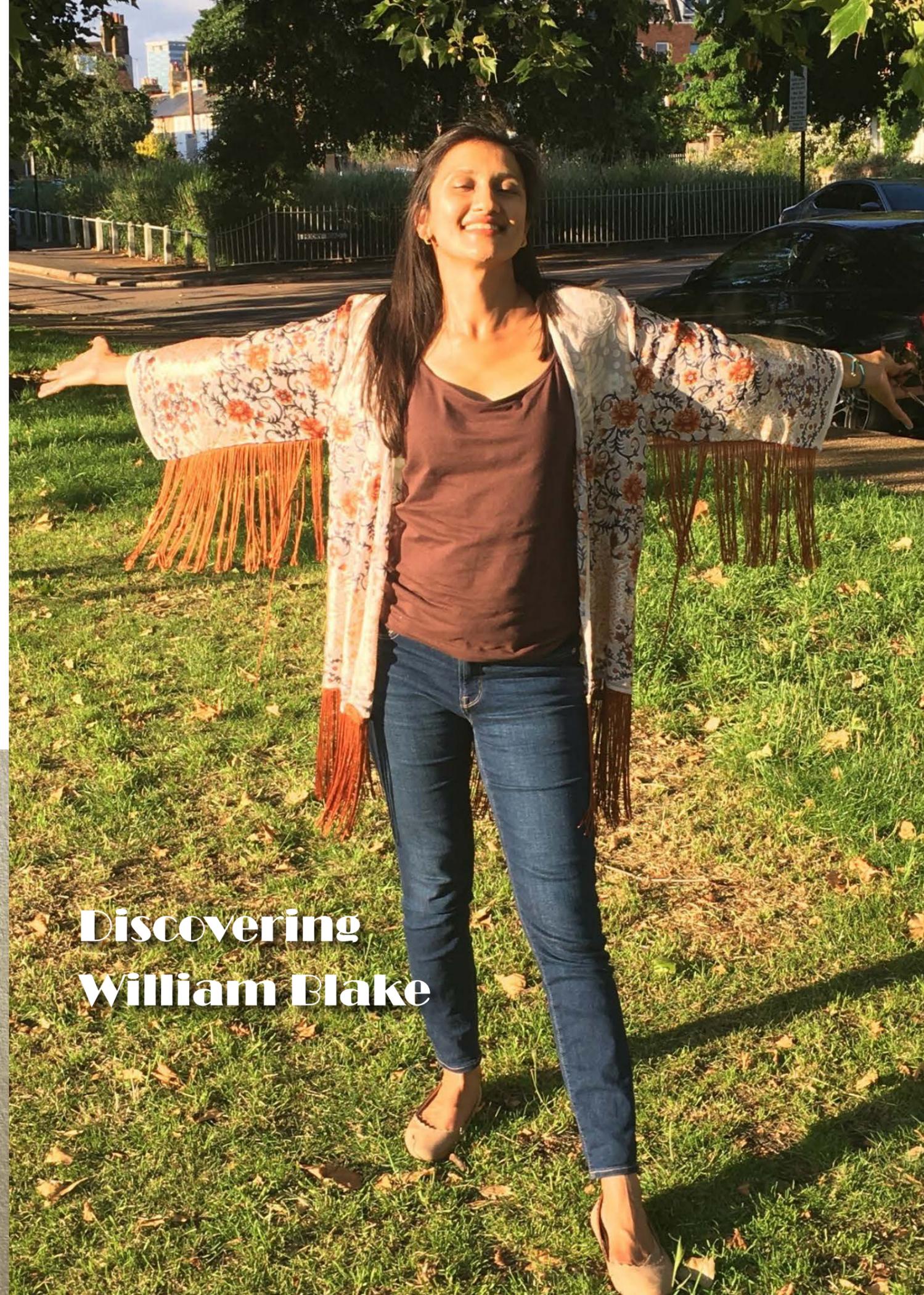
Return, rise anew, expand and fill my being entire
Rekindle my hearth with your beams of eternal love
Rend away this pall that petrifies my mental powers
Rejoice in our love and chant your song of eternal bliss.

Ramazan Saral

She looked into the forest with bewildered eyes
And what she beheld, she became.
Brambles, thorns and leaves and the rest
A wilderness sprang from her visage thus far kept tame.

The more she looked, the wilder became her eyes
And as the two mirrored each other
They merged and to new heights did they rise.

Ramazan Saral



**Discovering
William Blake**

How Blake Inspired My First Book of Prose & Poetry

Lena Shah

I am deeply and powerfully inspired by William Blake's work and life. After having visited the exhibition *The Visions of Albion* at Petworth House in 2018 and then the exhibition at Tate Britain in January 2020 for my fortieth birthday, I began to write my first book.

The painting *Albion Rose* (c. 1793) invited me to visit somewhere else inside, an unknown part within me. I was mesmerised by it. The image — innocent, yet knowing and almost slightly smug — has a gentle yet strong power to take us beyond ourselves. I am not a long-standing fan of William Blake or a connoisseur of the art world. However, I have been on my own healing journey over the last seven years and, during this time, I have made discoveries relating to art that have played an unimaginable, provocative and enriching part. The most powerful of these experiences was undoubtedly the exhibition at Tate Britain. After years of procrastination, Blake allowed me to start and finish the manuscript of my book the night of my visit there.

What I experienced from the exhibition was quite extraordinary — it was visceral and breath-taking. I knew I had finally reached a point where I would explode unless I sat down to write. I *absolutely had* to let it out. The exhibition allowed me to enter into another dimension. I could not stand back and not become involved.



Since that time, I have obviously learned more about Blake, becoming more secure in my self-empowerment from learning about his own controversies as well as drawing links to mindfulness.

Whilst I do not diminish the tragedy that COVID-19 has brought to so many, a paradoxical face appeared for me. I feel that I was able to see life differently.

‘To see a World in a Grain of Sand | And a Heaven in a Wild Flower | Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand’ (‘Auguries of Innocence’, ll. 1-3, E490) became my mantra during lockdown. I have now had the privilege of *living* this quote, one of the most liberating experiences in my life.

I found myself feeling fearless and focused despite the crisis around us — ‘Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence’ (pl. 3. E34) from Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* — becoming blissfully immersed in a mixture of activities such as automatic writing, yoga, reading poetry and attending beautiful online poetry workshops.

Without ‘seeing the possibility of *my new* world in a grain of sand’ my 2020 could easily have been filled with loneliness, despair and the recurrence of past trauma.

Instead, I held a deep feeling of contentment with the process of being still and going within, and my writing became my loyal and trusting companion. I transcended my left-brain thinking to finally trust wholeheartedly in another way. ‘I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans | I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create’ (*Jerusalem*, pl. 10, ll. 20-21, E153).

No bird soars too high. if he soars with his own wings. (*Marriage*, pl. 7, l. 15, E36)

And now, I look to the future with a sense of excitement about all I still have to discover and how Blake (and the wider art world) will influence me further. Thinking about it gives me a sense of life force and excitement, the kind of feeling you get before embarking on your favourite holiday. The special place you never tire of no matter how often you go. Thank you, William Blake.



Animating Blake

**Sheila Graber
& Sam Gainsborough
in conversation
with John Riordan**



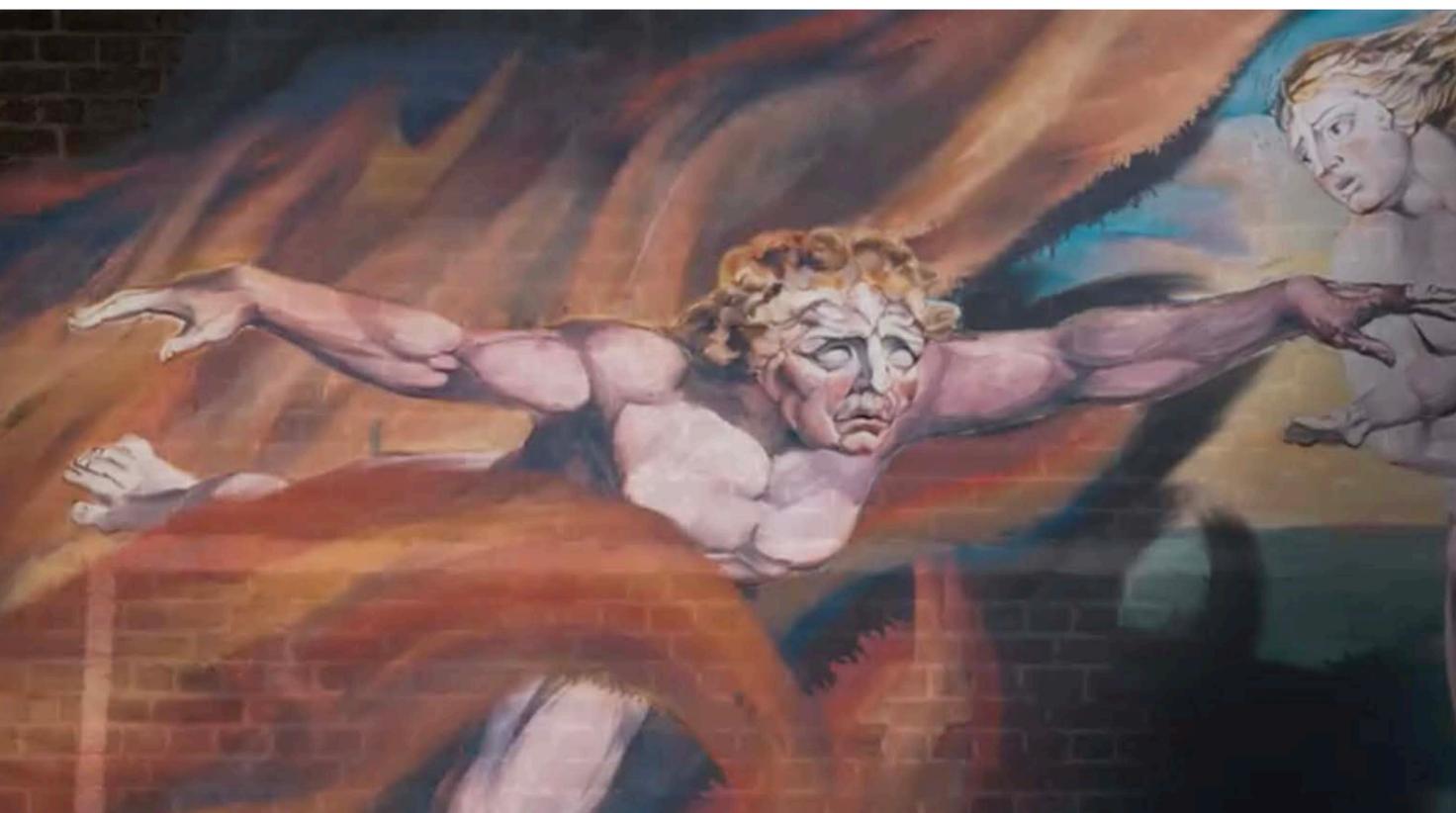


Sheila Graber is an animator, artist and educator from South Shields, County Durham. In the 1980s she worked on the animated series *Paddington* and animated the *Just So Stories* for television. In the 2000s she became Animator in Residence at the University of Teeside, and later Visiting Professor at the University of Sunderland. In 1978 she created the animation *William Blake and the Poet's Journey*: <https://youtu.be/Eg6X8gdUqXw>

Sam Gainsborough is an animator and director based in London. A graduate of the National Film and Television School, he won multiple awards for his graduation film *Facing It* and has gone on to animate numerous ad campaigns and music videos: <https://vimeo.com/samgainsborough>

In 2019 he created the trailer for Tate's William Blake exhibition: <https://youtu.be/Z7EPXc5K7DA>

Art Director of *VALA*, John Riordan met with Sheila and Sam over Zoom to discuss their experiences of animating Blake.



John: I discovered Sheila's animation, *William Blake and the Poet's Journey* last year and then I remembered the promo animation that you'd done, Sam, for the 2019-20 Blake exhibition, and I just thought how fascinating that at least twice the Tate have decided to commission an animation about William Blake...

Sheila: I wasn't commissioned, no money passed hands...

John: Ah, well this'll come on to my first question then. How did your animations come about?

Sheila: Well, I was an art teacher in secondary schools, in comprehensive schools, and I was doing my own animation stuff. I was teaching the history of art and I'm teaching kids, who if they don't like what you do, they'll throw a brick at you, right, so I thought if I can make films, and if they can also make their own little films, about the artists, it would keep their interest. So I made a film on Michelangelo to kick off with and then a little film called *Four Views of Landscape* about Constable, Turner, Monet and Van Gogh, and it was shown in an amateur festival and it won. Terry Measham [education officer] from the Tate Gallery spotted it and he said, "Would you like to come down and animate at the Tate? We've got a William Blake exhibition coming up. Bring your gear down, and you can start in the sculpture hall, and make a film, so that folks can see how animation's done, and how useful it can be in education." So, I said, yeah OK, packed my animation gear in the car and drove down, but yes, I never thought, John, of actually saying, would you like to pay me please?

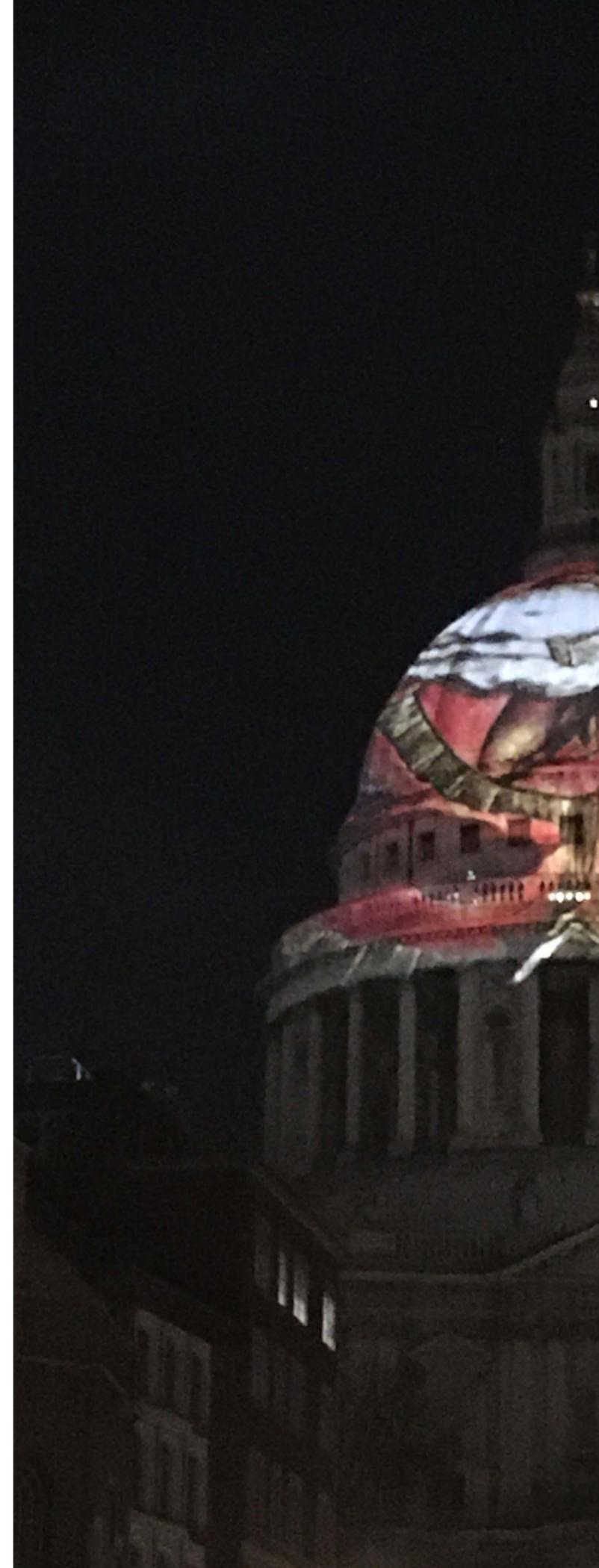
John: I see what you mean, so it wasn't commissioned exactly. Was this in the run-up to the '78 exhibition?

Sheila: It was during the exhibition itself. I well remember it, 'cause I was using the music from *Carmina Burana*. This guy comes in — "I say, that music, absolutely terrible, you can't have sound in an art gallery." And of course, Blake would have loved it.

John: You were in the big sculpture hall in Tate Britain, as it is now, with your paints and...?

Sheila: Yeah, I had my lightbox, paper, cels, paint, 16mm bolex camera on a rostrum, by then I'd moved from a tea trolley to a rostrum, so I was all set up, so that people could ask questions, and have a go, and my idea was they'd go back to their classroom with a super-8 camera and do stuff with their kids.

Sam: That's so amazing, I can only guess a little bit



about how it was made. About halfway through there are quite free interpretations of Blake's artworks. Would you be going in and looking at the physical artworks and copying from them? Were you looking at the exhibition and taking inspiration for the film? Was it quite fluid?

Sheila: Oh yeah, when you see the real thing, my god, there's an energy, isn't there, that comes out of it? I worked out the storyboard [for the animation] but it was the music that did it. I was reading everything I could about Blake and then at this Christmas party I heard this music, and I thought, wow! and that was *Carmina Burana*.

John: I love the idea of hearing that at a Christmas party!

Sheila: Yeah, it was some party! So I borrowed the record, took it home and I thought, that's Blake, that music is Blake. So the music pulled it together, I had all this disparate stuff, but the soundtrack would pull it together. Looking again at that storyboard, it does remind me of what the bits were. I find it interesting that you start with *The Ancient of Days*, and the flow of that beard, and that we both tuned into that. 'Cause Blake really doesn't need that much animating, does he Sam? He's so animated already, he just needs a little push.

Sam: No, that was the thing. I guess I was surprised to be asked to animate the paintings, to advertise the exhibition. Tate were really up for making them walk and do all kinds of things. But I really didn't want to see people going to the exhibition and saying "oh, they've ruined his artwork." So I was trying to be very cautious and thinking about it like, how would these paintings unravel? How would they run up to their position? 'Cause they're all so dynamic, like you say, they all have so much movement. I sort of wish I'd done a bit more movement now. Looking at yours, it's really cool knowing that you did it in the space. I got sent a handful of paintings from the Tate, ones that they were thinking it would be good to include. But I imagine for you, you must have had your storyboard and an idea of structure, and then you could go for a walk through the exhibition and say "oh, that's perfect for three minutes twenty" That must have been so much fun, day to day, to go with the mood and respond to the exhibition.

Sheila: You did very well, Sam. Whose idea was it to flow across the building where he was born?

Sam: That was me.

Sheila: Great idea!

Sam: They sent quite a few paintings, but *The Ancient of Days*, and *The Ghost of a Flea*, and *Newton*, they said "we need these three, and you can play in between that." I think they wanted to advertise the exhibition, to make it feel a bit cool and to appeal to a younger audience. I was fascinated by an amazing artist called BLU who does these stop-motion paintings on walls. I'd been really fascinated with that technique for a while, and I really like mixing digital techniques with analogue, so trying something like that, digitally, was interesting. So I pitched the idea that it was Blake's artworks, life-size, living on the streets where he used to be.

John: That's really interesting that that came from you, Sam, because comparing yours and Sheila's films, I think they pick up on quite distinct aspects of Blake. Sheila's is almost a retrospective in itself, which is interesting in that it came out of a big retrospective exhibition. There are images from all over Blake's big self-invented myth. It's like being in his head, it's a very self-contained universe of Blake. Whereas yours, Sam, feels like it's making the case for Blake as a London artist. Yeah, they're these crazy, phantasmagorical creatures but they're based in this certain place and of a certain place.

Sam: I always wanted it to be a bit ghostly and dreamy, like they're still living in the fabric of London. I think that was something that was a big part of their initial brief as well, that he was living in London. It wasn't a very big pitch; it wasn't a very big budget to be honest (laughs). But it was just a really cool thing. I mean it was just luxury getting sent these super high-quality stills of the paintings. It's so nerdy of me to say, but these paintings are only so big, and on your computer you can zoom all the way in. I think they loved the pitch because they were saying that William Blake dreamed of his artworks being seen really big.

John: Yeah, there are passages where he's, fantasising really, about having his images covering one wall of Westminster Abbey, that sort of thing.

Sam: But yeah, it was just amazing for me, 'cause I could just zoom in infinitely, into these....

John: I get your geekiness on this, Sam. Do you still have these files and can you send them to me?

[Tate, please note that this is a joke]

Sam: (laughs) They're really massive but it meant, for the detail of animating them, I had all the information you could dream of. Sort of too much! For each shot, I was really trying to keep all the information through to the end frame, and each shot ended up being, like 7GB. These Photoshop files of layers and layers and layers of cloned information.

Sheila: Did you animate in Photoshop?

Sam: Yeah, I did all the animation in Photoshop. I've used it since I was a kid.

Sheila: You're a layer person. While you were layering I was winding back on the 16mm film, and taking the next picture and winding it back. You'd take a picture and then wind it back so many frames, and then take the next picture and then wind it back, so you're superimposing that way, you're layering in the camera. And we both found that Blake needs very little animation, you just give him a little shove.

John: What is it, then, about Blake that lends him to animation?

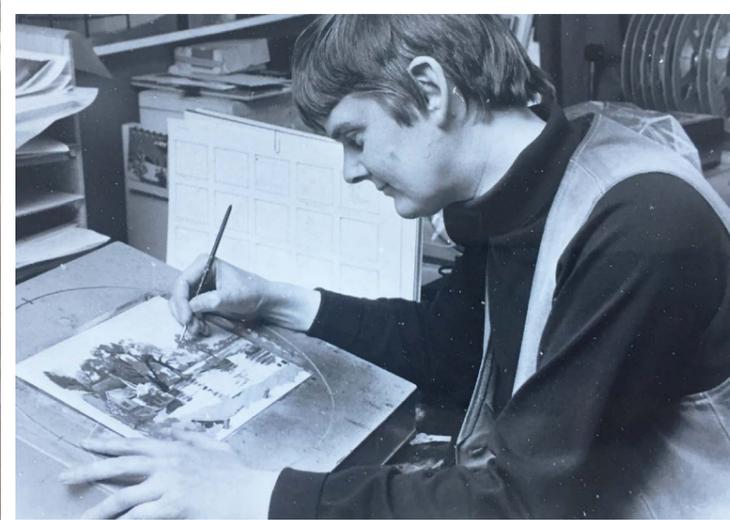
Sheila: It's the energy, the energy of the line. Now obviously, being a Geordie lass, Blake's London never struck me. For me what came out of it was the poet figure, winning through all sorts of stuff, and the idea of energy. "Energy is Eternal Delight." And it's so true. Sam, when you were busy doing it, did you feel a bit like there was a Blake there, like you were getting in somewhere with him?

John: Is there anybody there?

Sam: It was such an intimate process 'cause it was really just me and the paintings and a month. Not to keep going on about how big the files were....

John: You're making me jealous.

Sam: ... but you could get really lost in them, you know? There's something about taking someone else's work and trying to create movement with it, but also trying not to make it a Sam Gainsborough-looking thing, really trying to retain as much from the original piece as possible. And the way he constructs all the images, there's so much story



involved, the characters are always looking at something, they're always moving towards something. In most of them there's a real dynamic sense of direction, so all you really need to do is emphasise what's already there, the paintings already feel like they're moving.

John: Sam, what degree of research did you do when you were making your film?

Sam: The first thing was I just did enough research to go on a really big day out in London, with the Director of Photography. Broadwick Street was interesting, 'cause that street is completely built in front of where the old street was. So you'd be trying to find all these places, and you'd find a plaque round the corner where you weren't expecting it to be. But then I thought there's something really interesting about putting *The Ghost of a Flea* on top of a Leon chain restaurant. The Tate also wanted to feature St Paul's.

John: Was projecting on to St Paul's always the plan then? 'Cause that was on Blake's birthday, a bit later in the run of the exhibition.

Sam: I think they were always going to see if it could happen. When I finished they said "We really want to project your animation up there" and I was cringing 'cause I thought, people want to see William Blake, they don't want to see William Blake with a weird, flying beard! (laughs)

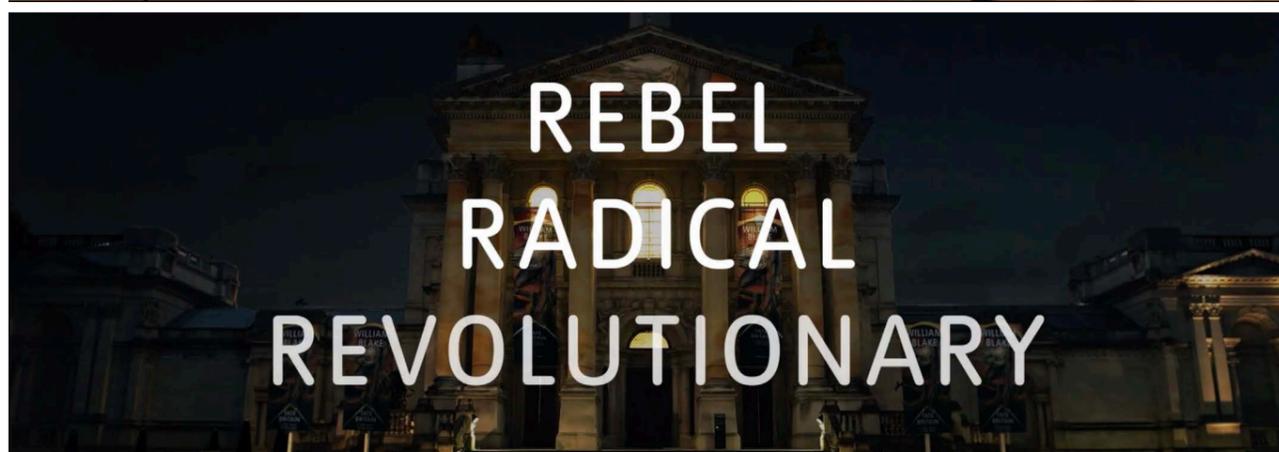
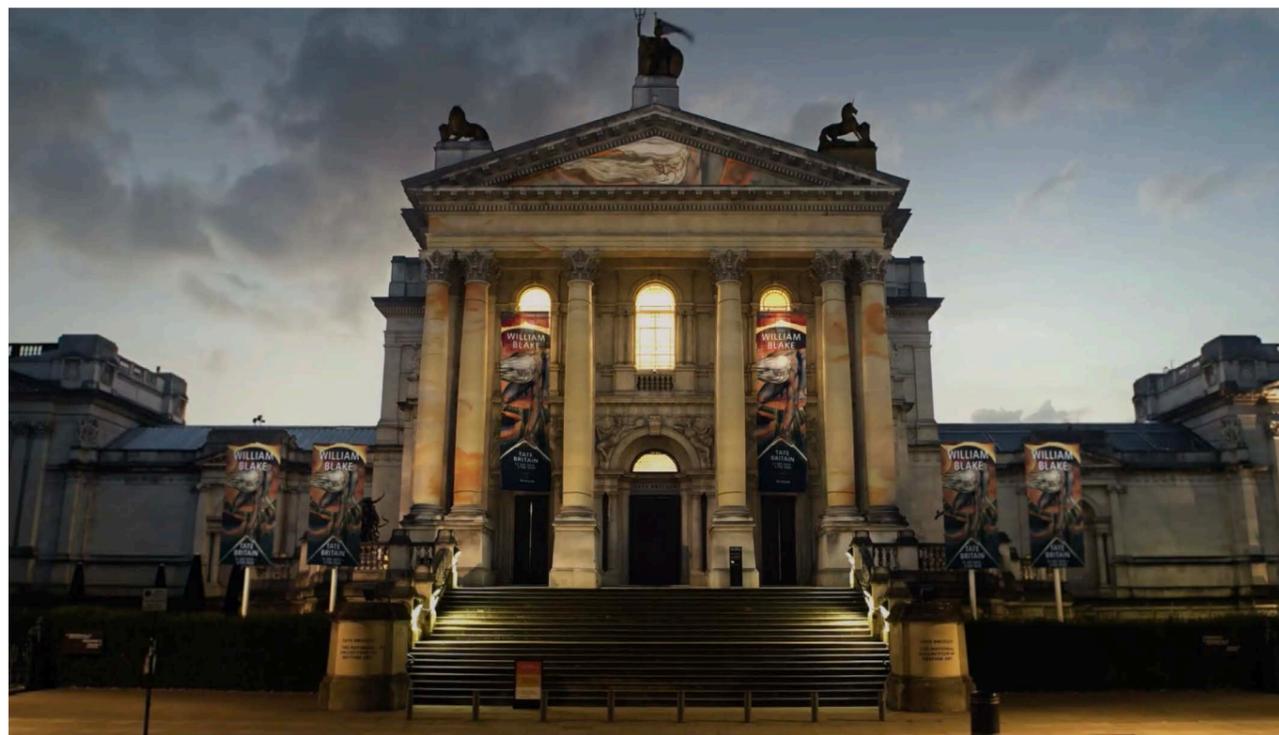
John: I took a train into town to see it, and I thought it was really subtly done. You were talking earlier about not wanting to over-animate, and I really don't think you did. With *The Ancient of Days* on St Paul's, it was just the flowing of the beard, wasn't it? And I think that was enough to give it life, but not try to make a new artwork that wasn't Blake.

Sheila: You caught the energy, Sam, don't worry about it. You caught it, and enhanced it, and so Blake would love it.

John: Do you know whose idea it was to use St Paul's?

Sam: No, I'm not sure.

John: I remember wondering if it was one of the curators who came up with it because, from a Blake fan point-of-view, conceptually it's brilliant. That bearded version of God is Urizen, who is the oppressive force of patriarchal religion, so for someone to persuade St Paul's to put that on the dome of their cathedral is really, brilliantly cheeky. It's a great bit of satire.



Sam: Wow... I think St Paul's only concern at the time was that it couldn't look anything like fire! We turned up the weekend before we were going to do it properly, with a big projector in the back of a van, and I brought a memory stick of various animations to try. We plugged it in and the first tester was the clouds moving, and it just looked like it was on fire, it just completely lit up the whole thing in orange....

John: 1666 all over again

Sam: But then they picked the giant, flame-coloured painting, so....

It was an amazing experience, the highlight of my career up to that point. You could see it from so far away, it was incredible.

John: It looked apocalyptic somehow, fire or not. Could we talk a bit more about your process, Sam? You shot live footage of the locations?

Sam: Yeah, we went out and took photos of different places. We made a storyboard and an animatic from those photos, which meant that we had a sense of the pacing of the whole thing. The Tate made a few changes and then when that was signed off, I started animating. [Sam shows time lapse footage of Broadwick Street] So this was a few weeks into the process, there's a time lapse without any animation on it.

[Rough animation of *The Ghost of a Flea*, walking]

And there's the animation that was going to be placed over it. I got someone to do some rough line drawing of how it would move, so I understood the perspective, and then I cut out the paintings and fit them to the line drawings, so it was a bit like a Terry Gilliam, top-down, cut-and-shove animation. Then I went through, very zoomed in, with a clone stamp and a smudge tool in Photoshop, keeping the colours and as much of the texture as possible, just like you're pushing the painting around.

[Work-In-Progress animation of *The Ancient of Days* with flowing hair and beard]

The hair was all painted by using the clone stamp to try and keep the texture going.

[WIP animation of *Newton*]

You can see here, I'd be working over the paintings, so I'd always have the reference to keep it accurate. But I think this shot was 20 GB or something (laughs). I was animating to the full size of the image, just to try and keep everything.

[WIP animation, more developed, of *The Ghost of a Flea* walking along Broadwick Street facade]

Sheila: There he goes, that's great.

Sam: Now this is the thing I'm really fascinated by, if you're going to do something digital but make it look analogue. You're still thinking, alright, if each frame is painted, what's going to happen to it when you paint the next frame?

Sheila: Hang on to that 'cause here I've got exactly the same....

[Sheila shares photo of animation cels with painted sequence of *Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils*] Now there is exactly what you've just shown me, but I just happen to have done it in separate drawings. You did it in separate drawings as well, it's just that mine are here for you to see on bits of cel, yours are in layers of Photoshop. We are very similar in that respect.

John: And even though Sam's is digital, you've both got that painty, physical texture.

Sheila: Because of Blake. It depends, again, what I'm animating.

[Sheila shows her storyboard]

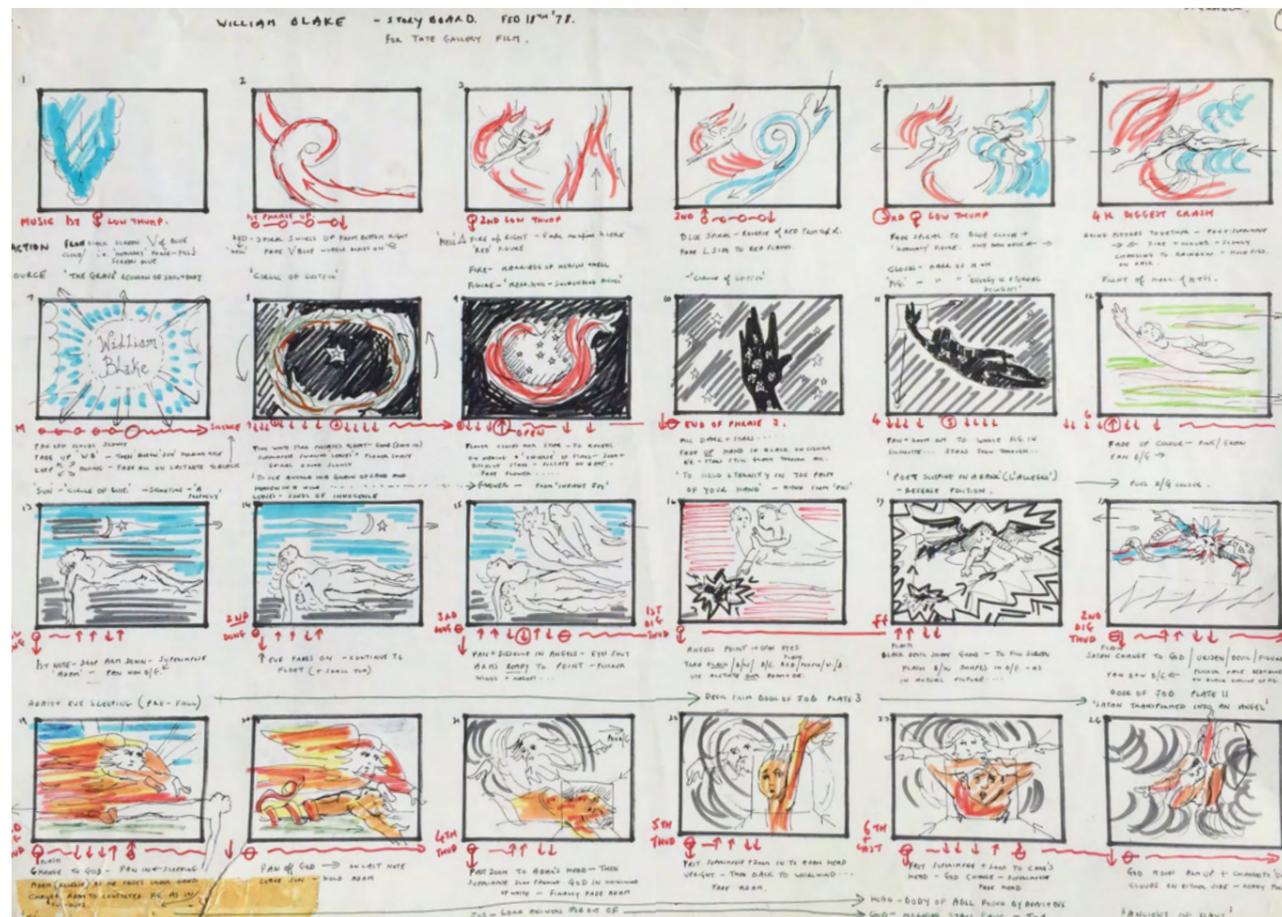
There's my storyboard, where you've got the thinking process. That's why we're both identical, Sam, in what we do. You have a bit of a reccy round, and you gather a whole heap of stuff, and if you're lucky you get the chance to use the music to do it, and not somebody bloody speaking all the time, although you did have someone speaking and that's very nice, so I don't be-little that.

John: Where did that come from, Sam? Did the Tate decide they wanted that?

Sam: I think they were thinking that but I still pitched it. I mean it's sort of a shame not to in a way. I think a lot of people know Blake for his words, so if that's a way in for people then....

Sheila: Yes, 'To see a World in a Grain of Sand...' I was trying to show it, so there's the world, there's the sand, but I didn't say it, I was hoping people could get whatever they want to get from it. It's there, but rather than overtly saying it.... Yes, the words are crucial too.

John: Looking at both your animations today made me think about an essay I read recently, by Morris Eaves [Introduction: 'To Paradise the Hard Way' in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, first published in 2003]. He was saying that one of the things about Blake, and actually one of the reasons he wasn't more commercially successful, is that he was a synthesiser as an artist, and what I think he means by that is that he wanted to do everything. He thought in images and he



thought in words. He would apparently sing his poems, and often his poems are presented as songs. That's why he wanted to make his books in his own way, with his own method of printing. So it struck me that maybe that's another reason that Blake works well being animated, because he was trying to combine everything. He is the sort of guy who's trying to do ALL ART, in ALL MEDIUMS.

Sheila: He's a bringer-together-er. And why the hell all the arts got split up, God knows. He was way ahead, I mean I would love to have him as our Minister of Education, 'cause that's what we want. We want to bring it together, 'cause that's when you get the things happening. And that's what I was shown to do when I was twenty-one, as an art teacher, bring it together. Everyone can be an artist, everyone can do something in their own way, your job is to bring it out. And that's why I used good old Blake, when I first started teaching. Look at the world now, sadly so much energy is being used to destroy. Blake would say, get your bloody finger out and use it to create, and make it exciting, make it interesting. That's Blake — make, don't destroy.

John: One of the things Blake is for me is the patron saint of just making stuff, and you sort of hope that that can be a career (laughs) and that's nice if that happens. But you know, there's a... compulsion.

Sheila: He just kept going. I mean, I stopped teaching when I was forty, to go into animation and I've done it ever since, as you are doing Sam. And yes, you can make a living out of animation, and you can make a living out of art. So yeah, that's what Blake stood for, for freedom, and I'd love to see that built into our curriculum, but one day....

John: I've been avoiding asking this crass question but I'm going to ask it now — do you think if he were alive today, William Blake might be animating?

Sam: (laughs) I was going to say that a minute ago and stopped myself....

Sheila: Yes, he would, because it's a great bringer-together, isn't it, Sam? It brings everything together.

Sam: I feel like I'm making the same point again, but every image is so packed with movement, and story, it's like he was already animating in one frame in a way. I just took it for granted that he did all these different things, but it's a fantastically inspiring thing. He would be making in whatever media to express whatever he wants to express.

John: This has been wonderful, thank you both.

Sheila: It's great to meet you, Sam. And you John, you'll definitely have to have a go [at animation].

John: As I understand it, animation is the art form that takes even longer to make than comics!

Sheila: It depends on the method you use — it can just take a few hours to make a movie. The four-minute William Blake animation took a month, off and on.

Sam: You should do it. I started it when I was I think I was thirteen. For a lot of kids it's just so intuitive, it blows my mind that kids know how to do stop-motion. And it's still the closest thing ever to real magic, in my mind. I'm very impatient when it comes to drawing or literally anything else, but when it comes to animation, for some reason I can sit there for hours. 'Cause you press play and it's magic.

Sheila: It is magic, well said, Sam.

From March to October 2021 South Shields Museum and Art Gallery hosted a major retrospective of Sheila's work to celebrate her 80th birthday. You can view an online version of the exhibition at <http://www.sheilagraberanimation.com>



‘Forming the fluctuating Globe’: Weaving Women and Corporeal Cartography in Blake’s Jerusalem

Caroline Anjali Ritchie

There is a passage in *Jerusalem* in which Los enjoins the Daughters of Albion to ‘Form the fluctuating Globe according to their will’ using their special craft — weaving (pl. 83, l. 34, E241). The question of ‘will’ is equivocal: in Blake’s time the term ‘Daughter’ was used to refer to young female workers in the British textile industry (Moyer 2014–15: ¶13), and Blake’s portrayal of the spinning and weaving Daughters does seem to rehearse a nightmare-vision of industrial slavery, annihilating altogether the labourer’s ‘will’.

Curiously, the Daughters often appear as though complicit in the very system that oppresses and absorbs them: their totalising threads are apt to bind ‘the whole Earth’ (pl. 67, l. 29, E220). This global imagery seems in particular to map the world cotton industry, which from 1800 onwards was increasingly becoming centralised and organised from Britain, relying for its raw materials primarily on cotton grown by African slaves in America (Riello 2013: chapters 9 and 10).

Blake, however, recognises the impossibility of transforming systems by simply drafting new maps of the Earth as a ‘whole’. Such logic, as Blake seems to have discerned, in the first place underpins the dehumanising

global reach sought and consolidated by global industrial systems. The maps favoured in *Jerusalem* are continual works in progress, minutely generated by and with the bodies inhabiting the world; these mappings can be

understood as a kind of corporeal cartography. This tendency is perhaps most persistently palpable in the embodied, affective cartographies of Los as he builds

the utopian city Golgonooza. But the labouring bodies of *Jerusalem*’s female weavers also form a basis for corporeal cartography.

Despite Blake’s frequent association of female weaving with war, abstraction, and enslavement in a quasi-Urizenic vein (O’Donoghue 2014: 97), there is also a potentially redemptive side to the imagery, for instance in the figure of Enitharmon, Los’s female counterpart. I want to venture that Blake’s lively ontology of mapping fundamentally accommodates female bodies, including those of the Daughters of Albion, who may otherwise appear to function as cogs in some Satanic machine.

Jerusalem is replete with thwarted, abortive efforts to create maps that might make the future more thinkable. Los’s speech, from which I have quoted above, remains

*the Daughters often appear as though complicit
in the very system that oppresses and absorbs
them: their totalising threads are apt to bind
‘the whole Earth’*





somewhat ambivalent about the product of the Daughters' labour. On the one hand, Los suggests that the Daughters' world-weaving ought to be of a distinctly corporeal (as opposed to abstracted or mentalised) nature

According as they weave the little embryon nerves
& veins
The Eye, the little Nostrils, & the delicate Tongue
& Ears
Of labyrinthine intricacy: so shall they fold the
World
(*Jerusalem*, pl. 83, ll. 35-37, E241).

On the other hand, Los appears to dismiss the Daughters' work as ultimately little more than '[a]n outside shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface' (pl. 83, ll. 47, E242). As Los would have it, acting alone, the Daughters' cartographies are at once profoundly corporeal and profoundly insubstantial; they are fated to fail.

Still, Blake seems reluctant to dismiss the Daughters' cartographic efforts entirely, especially the corporeality thereof. Although Los's mapping of Golgonooza is privileged in *Jerusalem*, one does not have to view the Daughters as *entirely* excluded from Blakean mapping-in-progress. On plate 57, there is a striking visualisation of what appears to be three of the Daugh-

ters emanating thread-like fibres which are attached to the surface of an earth-disc (perhaps the 'fluctuating Globe') at the centre of the plate, spliced with a panel of poetry. The flesh-coloured fibres sprout from their hair and extremities, evoking the 'nerves & veins' later mentioned by Los on plate 83. The earth-disc is only loosely recognisable as a warped map of the Earth: 'Jerusalem' sits at the lower pole, 'London' at the upper pole, with 'York' appearing due-west of 'London'. It is difficult to make sense of this, but it seems overly wishful to collapse it into some Blakean cartographic 'system'.

What I find most compelling about this image, as a trace of Blake's thought, is the attempt to create a world-map without minimising the corporeal entanglements which constitute the 'fluctuating' world, and which are simultaneously constituted by it. Characteristically, Blake discloses this ontological imaginary by synchronising divergent scales — biological, geographical, cosmological — within one pictorial plane, exceeding the bounds of analogy to *literalise* the symbiotic relations between those scales. Such Blakean 'impossible landscapes' (Makdisi 2003: 240) enticingly unsettle a dualistic boundary between 'external' world and human psycho-biological experience.

In a similar vein, eco-philosopher Timothy Morton urges readers to embrace the 'uncanny sense of existing

on more than one scale at once' as a key moment towards an 'ecological awareness' divested of a rigid and objectifying notion of an external 'Nature' (Morton 2016: 25).

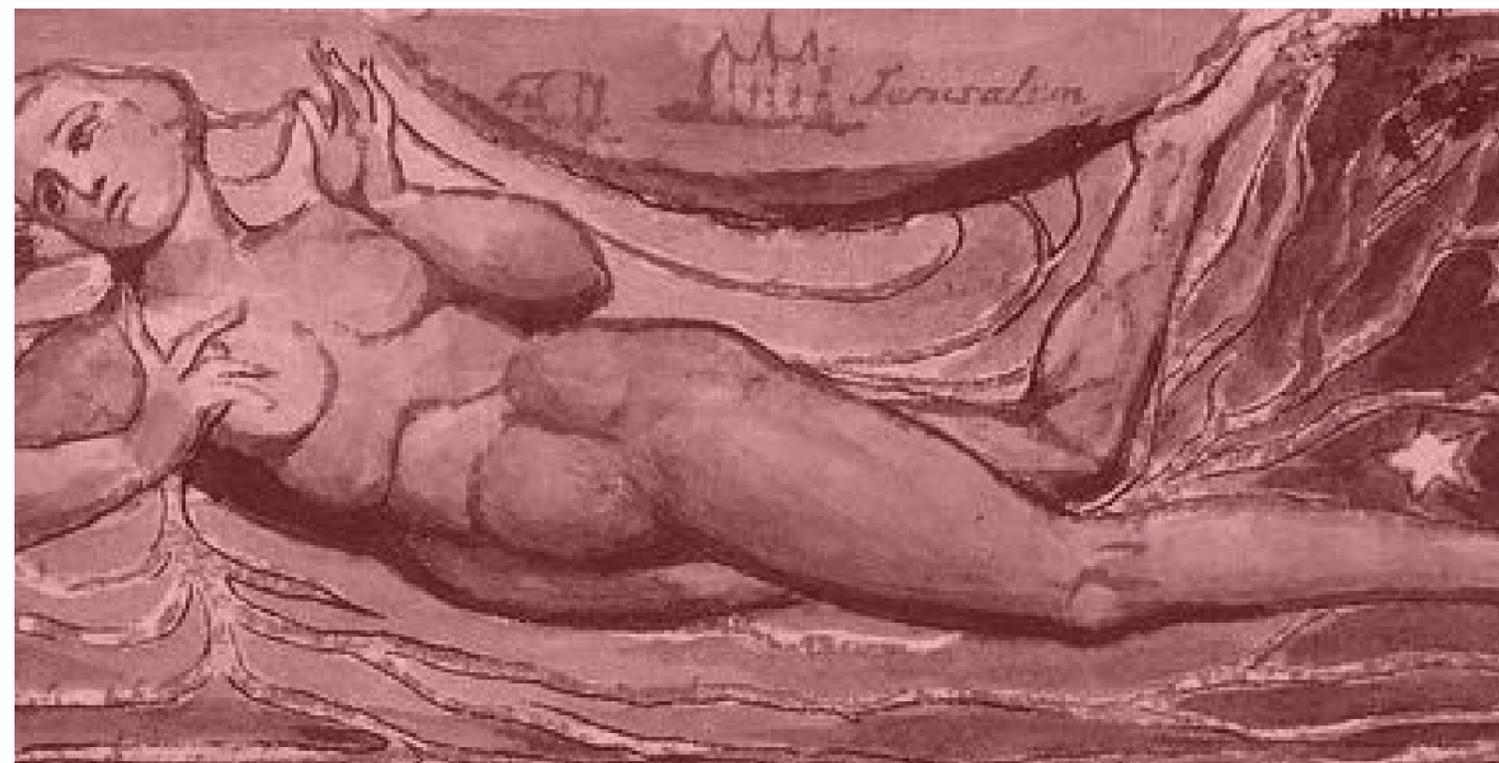
Meanwhile, though the landscape of this image may seem 'impossible', in part through its apt use of threadlike imagery, it may work to map the all-too-real conditions of cotton production in particular — a global 'hemispheric system' based on slave labour in both American slave colonies and British industrial cities (Moyer 2014-15: ¶1 and *passim*). The design can be seen as mapping the close entanglement between labouring (female) bodies and global systems of industrial exploitation and slavery.

Though bleak from this perspective, along with this possible indictment can also come recognition of the multiple spatiotemporal scales at which lives occur, an ontological awareness that is for Blake a vital first step in any attempt at re-mapping the present. The challenge of recognising these multiple scales thus has both ecological and socio-economic stakes that retain fresh urgency today.

The weaving Daughters of Albion have — quite rightly — been regarded as malignant reincarnations of the formidable classical Fates or Norse Norns (e.g. O'Donoghue 2014: 96-97), and as ciphers of 'a proto-Marxian collapse of worker into her commodity' (Moyer 2014-15: ¶15), reified in the bodies of part-submissive, part-complicit females. Yet Blake's imagery of weaving is highly ambivalent. Much can be gained, I think, from reading these female figures as potentially legitimate participants in a wider project of bodying forth maps for the emergent future.

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The Agon of Blake

Elizabeth Effinger

I'm drawn to Blake's work for its queer entanglements and deeply visceral wrestling, its preoccupation with the grappling or struggling of opposing forces. As Blake writes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), 'Without Contraries is no progression' (pl. 3, E34). Blake's work both registers and requires a psychological and intellectual torsion, like the twisted, writhing, suffering, and beautiful bodies of the *Laocöon* group. Indeed, Blake's engraving *Laocöon* (c. 1815, c. 1826-27) remains for me a constellation for the alluring and enduring power of Blake's agon.

Blake's *Laocöon* features a design that Blake initially created in 1815 for Abraham Rees's *The Cyclopaedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*.

Blake later returns to this design and additionally inscribes a whirlwind of words — his opinions on art, religion, money, empire, and morality — around and within this central image. This hybrid design, difficult to classify, recalls, in Julia Wright's words, everything from 'an illustrated essay [...] a jigsaw puzzle [...] graffiti' to 'marginal annotations' (2004: 5).

It is a scene that is also a wrestling with writing, the writhing human figures not only grappling with the serpent but also with the vortex of words that swirl and swallow the central image. We cannot avoid this visual parallel between the enormous snake and the overpowering shape of words — English and Hebraic — that slither around the plate. As Sarah B. Stein poignantly writes, 'The whole print ripples like the torso muscles

of Yah/Laocöon' (2013: 627) — core muscles that are even more chiseled in Blake's rendition, enhancing its intensity and sense of suffering beyond that available in the original (Connolly 2002: 60).

If Blake wrenched the original scene of *Laocöon* out of its classical Grecian context to transplant it into biblical times, we might in the same spirit perform a similar and further wrenching and take it as a figure for thought more broadly — an embodiment of the wrestling we perform with our various 'mind-forg'd manacles' that Blake in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* describes ('London', l. 8, E27). This is part of the plate's poten-

cy; it is a powerful embodiment of the force of Blake's work, reflecting not only the way that Blake himself wrestled with the shackling of our minds, the imprisoning systems we invent and impose on ourselves, but with how we, as scholars, continue to wrestle with his

rich, challenging work, and with histories and thought more broadly. This struggle or agon, as B. W. Powe says, 'is a striving that moves us towards recombination — alchemical unity, a mixing of energies'; it is a struggle 'with traditions and texts, with thought, with observations' that is 'an intellectual adventure, a turbulent movement towards self-definition, a jagged line of argument and story which leads to new grounds for reflection' (2014: 15). This dialectical thrashing, a kind of *Auseinandersetzung*, moves us creatively into the new.

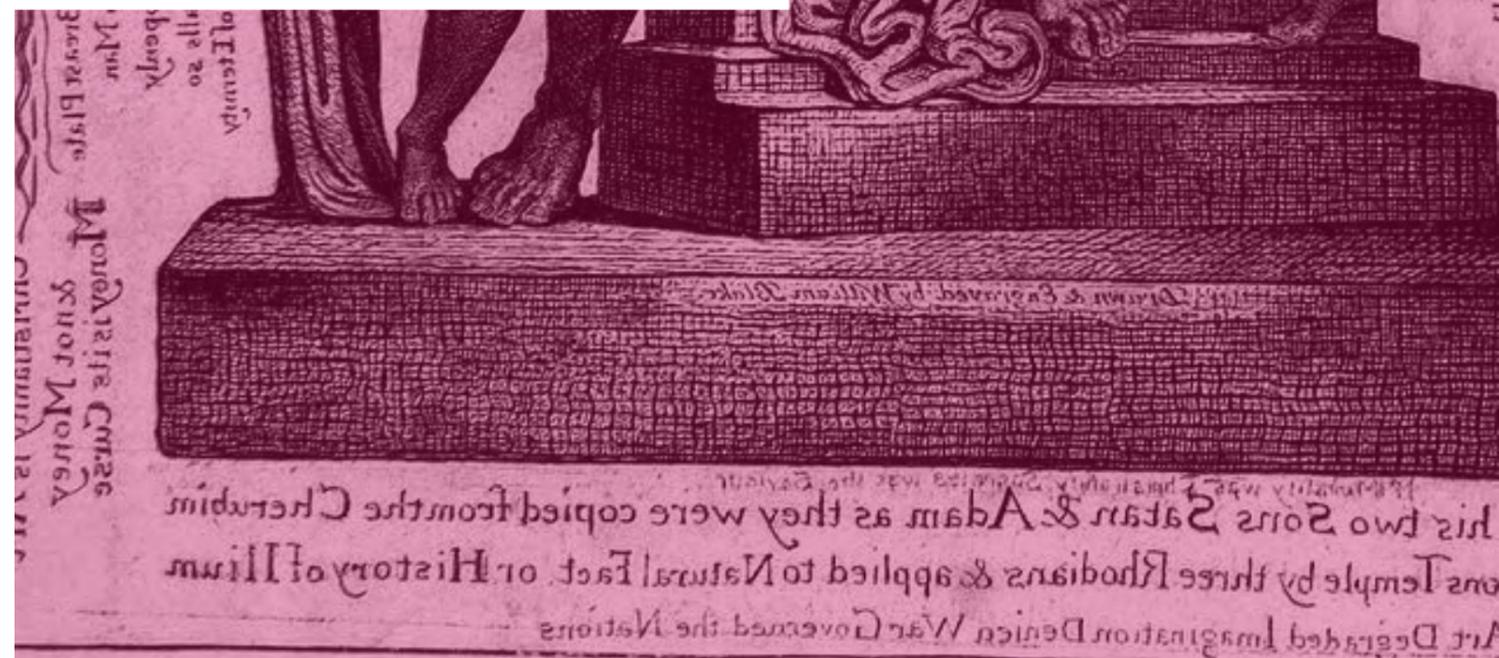
During my last visit to London in the fall of 2019, mere months before the global pandemic would shut down life as we knew it, I went and again stood before

the beautiful plaster cast of the *Laocöon and his Sons* at the Royal Academy, a version of which Blake himself would have seen. Now, more than one year into the pandemic in a time that feels violent, oppressive, and isolating, I also see the *Laocöon* engraving as a call for hope, the challenge to continue wrestling and 'not cease from mental fight', as Blake writes in the preface to *Milton*, 'Till we have built Jerusalem | In Englands green & pleasant Land' (pl. 1 [j], ll. 15-16, E96).

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If Blake wrenched the original scene of Laocöon out of its classical Grecian context to transplant it into biblical times, we might in the same spirit perform a similar and further wrenching and take it as a figure for thought more broadly



‘The Watry Shore’

Blake and the Platonic Ideal

Eugenie Freed

Introduction. (From *Songs of Experience*)
 Hear the voice of the Bard!
 Who Present, Past, & Future sees
 Whose ears have heard,
 The Holy Word,
 That walk'd among the ancient trees.

Calling the lapsed Soul
 And weeping in the evening dew:
 That might controll,
 The starry pole;
 And fallen fallen light renew!
 O Earth O Earth return!
 Arise from out the dewy grass;
 Night is worn,
 And the morn
 Rises from the slumberous mass.

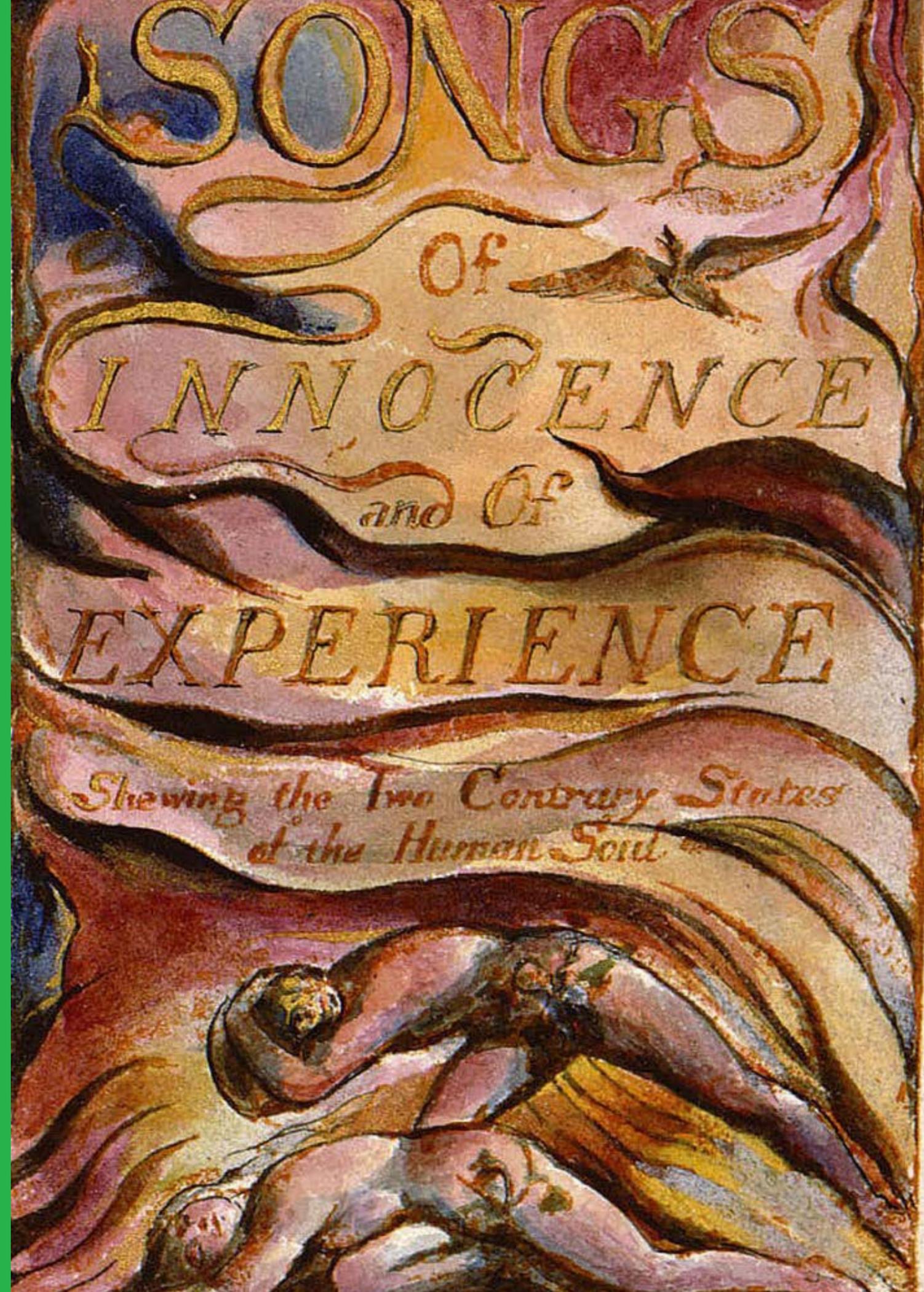
Turn away no more:
 Why wilt thou turn away
 The starry floor
 The watry shore
 Is giv'n thee till the breakof day. (ll. 1-20, E18)

The text of Blake's 'Introduction' to his *Songs of Experience* is engraved over a huge threatening thundercloud, seen against the starry sky of night. Earth, personified as a nude woman, has turned her back on the reader. She reclines on a couch under the words of the text.

In the first two stanzas of this poem, Blake brings us back to the source from which he drew the concepts of 'Innocence' and 'Experience': John Milton's account of the Fall of Man in *Paradise Lost* (PL). The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (PL, XII. 632-44) is illustrated on the title-page of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794):

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3. 8)

Blake views the passage from Genesis that inspired the first two stanzas of his poem through the lens of Milton's version of the Fall. Blake's Bard also



hears the voice of the Lord. As an artist and creator, the Bard shares with Milton's God his ability to see 'Present, Past, & Future' (l. 2, E18) simultaneously. In *Paradise Lost* God views the universe 'from his prospect high, | Wherein past, present, future he beholds ...' (PL, III. 77-78). But should we identify Blake's 'Holy Word | That walk'd among the ancient trees ...' (ll. 4-5, E18) with Milton's 'mild judge and intercessor' (PL, X. 96) — 'walking in the garden' in 'the evening cool' (PL, X. 98, 95) — or, for that matter, with the 'Lord God' of Genesis? That question remains open.

The second stanza of Blake's 'Introduction' to *Songs of Experience* brings in other puzzling ambiguities. The 'lapsed Soul' (l. 6, E18) is surely that of Man in his fallen condition; but is it the Bard, or the Holy Word, who is calling the Soul? Is the Soul 'weeping in the evening dew' (l. 7, E18), or is it the Bard who weeps? And which of them 'might controll | The starry pole ...'? 'Starry pole' is Milton's phrase, quoted from PL (IV.724), referring to Polaris, the North Star about which the starry sky in the Northern hemisphere appears to rotate. The phrase

forms part of the prayer chanted 'unanimous[ly]' by Adam and Eve just before they lie down to make love, and to rest, on this last night of their innocence. Did Blake intend, by this reminder, to con-

trast Milton's lush evocation of pre-lapsarian sexuality in this passage of PL, with the post-lapsarian sexual deprivation implied in lines 13-20 of 'Earth's Answer'?

At the moment when the Bard speaks the words of the poem, Adam and Eve have been expelled from Paradise. The prophet Isaiah calls on them to 'Arise ... And fallen fallen light renew' — for the 'fallen' or lapsed Soul has yet the ability to redeem itself. The third stanza suggests Isaiah's command to the nations of the earth: 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee' (Isaiah 60.1). The prophet Jeremiah cried 'O Earth, Earth, Earth, hear the word of the Lord!' (Jeremiah 22. 29). Jeremiah, deploring the intractable stupidity of his king, is echoed by John Milton, bewailing the folly of the English people in choosing 'a captain back for Egypt' (qtd in Patrides 1974: 358) — restoring the monarchy to their country after the death

of Oliver Cromwell, and the collapse of his 'Commonwealth', in 1658:

Thus much I should perhaps have said, though I were sure I should have spoken only to trees and stones; and had none to cry to, but with the Prophet, O earth, earth, earth! to tell the very soil it self [sic], what her perverse inhabitants are deaf to. (qtd in Patrides 1974: 358)

Milton laments the foolishness of his countrymen in their preference for effective slavery under a monarch to any form of democracy. Blake, a Jacobin in his sympathies, and always a satirical critic of the British monarchy, would have agreed.

During the period when he was writing the *Songs of Experience* (first published in 1794), Blake was also composing his own poetic and prophetic commentaries on the American and French revolutions, which (at the time) he heartily supported. His prophecies *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), *The French Revolution* (1791),

America (1793) and *Europe* (1794) were all in the making when Blake's Bard called out to the fallen Earth. Milton's heartfelt cry of frustration at the failure of his appeal to the English people in 1660 parallels the

urgent entreaty of Blake's Bard to the despairing Earth.

In the remainder of the 'Introduction' to the *Songs of Experience* Blake suggests that a new and liberating perspective of both Time and Space lies beyond 'Experience'. The Bard — who, like the Piper from the *Songs of Innocence*, represents the poet and artist — is capable of 'stopping the clock', of evoking the dimension of Eternity. 'Present, Past, & Future' (l. 2, E18) appear to him simultaneously. The 'night of Time', he predicts, is drawing to an end; the 'eternal day' is about to dawn. 'Night is worn, | And the morn | Rises from the slumberous mass' (ll. 13-14, E18). The 'slumberous mass' is the world in its fallen state, but the rising of the sun of liberty will awaken it from slumber, with the dawning of the 'truth new born', of which the Bard in 'The Voice of the Ancient Bard' will sing at the end of *Songs of Experience* (l.3, E31). Measurable Time will be tran-

Did Blake intend, by this reminder, to contrast Milton's lush evocation of pre-lapsarian sexuality in this passage of PL, with the post-lapsarian sexual deprivation implied in 'Earth's Answer'?



EARTH'S Answer.

Earth rais'd up her head,
 From the darkness's 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 den
 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's plow?

Break this heavy chain,
 That does freeze my bones around
 Selfish! vain!
 Eternal bane!
 That free Love with bandage bound.

scended to become Eternity; Space in this new world will take on the dimensions of Infinity. The limitations of the everyday world we all know are only temporary; as Blake says in the last line of the 'Introduction': 'giv'n thee till the break of day' (l. 20, E18) — they were put in place out of divine compassion, to protect mankind, to prevent this fallen world from crumbling into chaos before the new day dawns.

My understanding of the final stanza draws on Plato's *Symposium*, to which Blake was probably introduced through his relationship in the early 1780s with the Platonic scholar Thomas Taylor. At this time Blake was attending gatherings, including lectures by Taylor, at a Salon hosted by his friends John and Anna Flaxman (Damon 1988: 396-97; Bentley 2001: 82-84). Blake's 'watry shore' (l. 19, E18) is the edge of what Diotima, the teacher of Socrates, calls the 'vast sea of beauty', or the 'great ocean of beauty' — the Platonic ideal of beauty whose contemplation will enable the artist and poet to 'create many fair and noble thoughts and discourses' (Plato 1871), or to 'give birth to many beautiful and magnificent speeches and thoughts' (Plato 1956: 105). The 'starry floor' (l. 18, E18), with which this key phrase 'the watry shore' rhymes, implies that what fallen beings now see as the heavens above them will become the supporting platform for this ideal world. The base, or 'floor', on which mankind stands at the present moment, sustains humanity until it can rise to a higher and better condition.

But these possibilities are strongly opposed by 'Earth's Answer' in the second poem from *Songs of Experience*. Earth responds with despair to the hope-filled voice of the Bard.

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 den
 Cold and hoar
 Weeping o'er
 I hear the Father of the ancient men

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 Or the plowman in darkness plow?

Break this heavy chain,
 That does freeze my bones around
 Selfish! vain!
 Eternal bane!
 The free Love with bondage bound.
 (ll. 1-25, E18-19)

The plate on which 'Earth's Answer' appears is replete with dead and dying tendrils and branches, and across the foot of the page the serpent slithers who originally persuaded Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. But there hangs also an untouched bunch of grapes, which could be

Nobodaddy 'is not 'Our Father who art in Heaven'. He is nobody's Daddy: he is the 'silent & invisible | Father of Jealousy'

plucked and enjoyed if Earth were not in this mood of 'grey despair' (l. 5, E18).

The grapes appear at the end of line 10, 'I hear the Father of the ancient men ...'. Is this 'Father' to be identified with 'The Holy Word' (l. 4, E18) in the previous poem? Or is this the God whom Blake nicknamed 'Nobodaddy'?

'Nobodaddy 'is not 'Our Father who art in Heaven' (Matthew 6.9). He is nobody's Daddy — he is the 'silent & invisible | Father of Jealousy' whom Blake addressed in the Notebook poem 'To Nobodaddy' (ll. 1-2, E471), and who 'Farted & Belch'd & cough'd' in the heavens in the irreverent satire 'When Klopstock England defied' (l. 1 of ll. 1-32, E500-01). Blake identifies 'Nobodaddy' with the God of the Old Testament, whom he views as a severe judge and a tyrant.

Earth fears this deity, for he is 'Cruel jealous selfish' (l. 12, E18) and 'vain' (l. 23, E19). She cannot see the bounds of the material world as a merciful limitation to the Fall of Man, which is the point of view offered by the Bard in the 'Introduction'. To the personified

Earth, the post-lapsarian world is a place of captivity in which she is chained and immobilized. She believes she is 'prison'd on watry shore' (l. 6, E18): that same 'watry shore' that the Bard in the 'Introduction' names as a form of protection, 'Giv'n thee till the break of day' (l. 20, E18). The Bard recognises the 'watry shore' as the fringe of the 'great ocean of beauty' (Plato 1871) — the Platonic ideal of beauty; contemplating it will enable the artist and poet to bring forth inspired creations. But the Earth believes herself to be paralysed, frozen, 'Chain'd in night' (l. 14, E19); the images she applies to herself are the cold of the winter and the darkness of night. The sower does not 'sow by night' (l. 19, E19), nor does the 'plowman in darkness plow' (l. 20, E19), and it is pointless for either to perform his task in the winter. The Earth's sense of defeat threatens to wither fertility in every form — Spring is aborted by a perpetual Winter — and also to kill artistic creativity.

As an artist, the Bard must respond to Earth's plea, 'Break this heavy chain | That does freeze my bones around...' (ll. 21-22, E19). Until he succeeds in freeing her, in transforming her negative perception that her condition is hopeless, the fallen Earth and her inhabitants will remain convinced that they are chained and impotent — even though, as Blake reveals in 'London'

(a poem from *Songs of Experience*), their manacles are self-created and 'mind-forg'd' (l. 8, E27).

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Vala and Metamorphosis

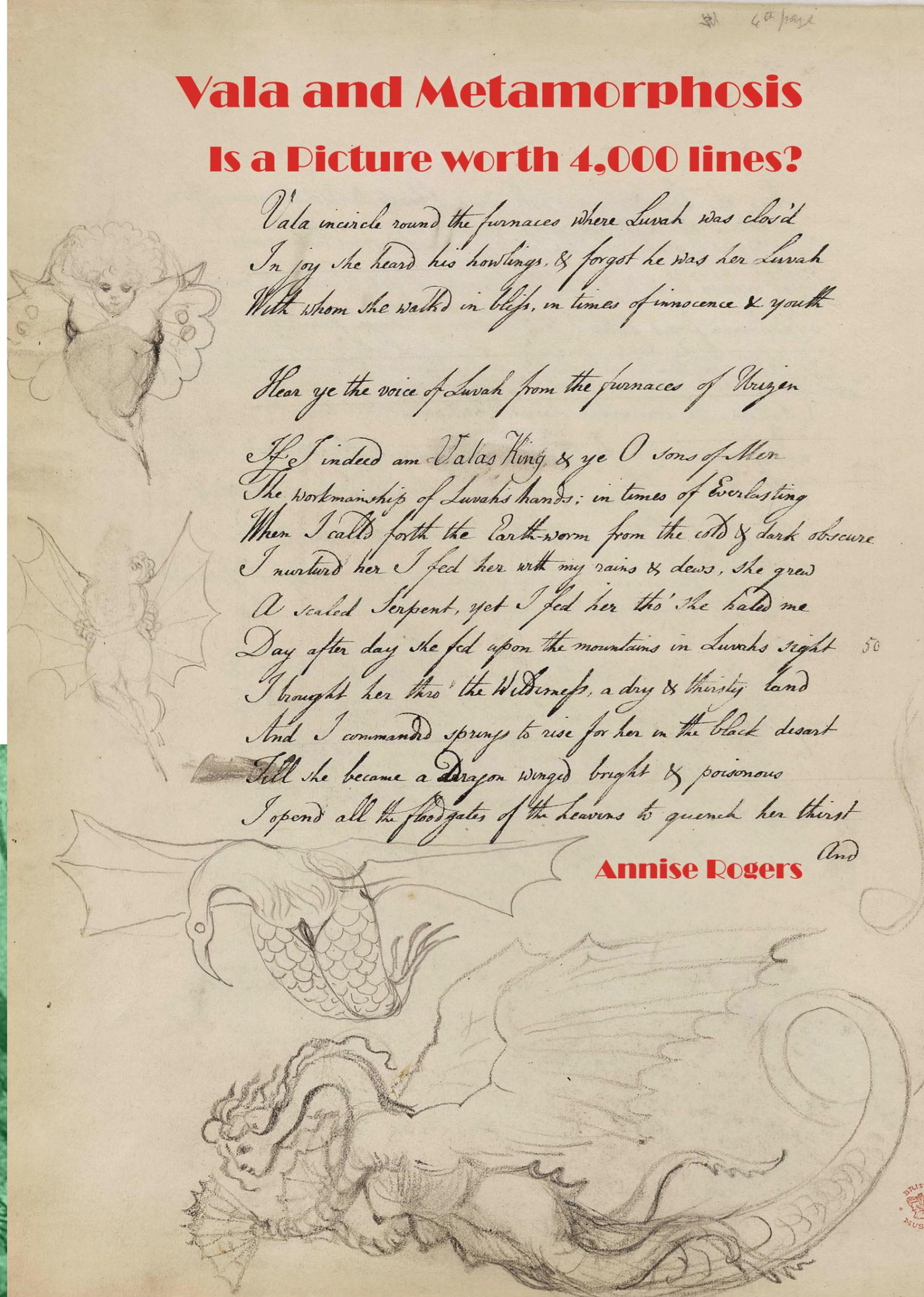
Is a Picture worth 4,000 lines?

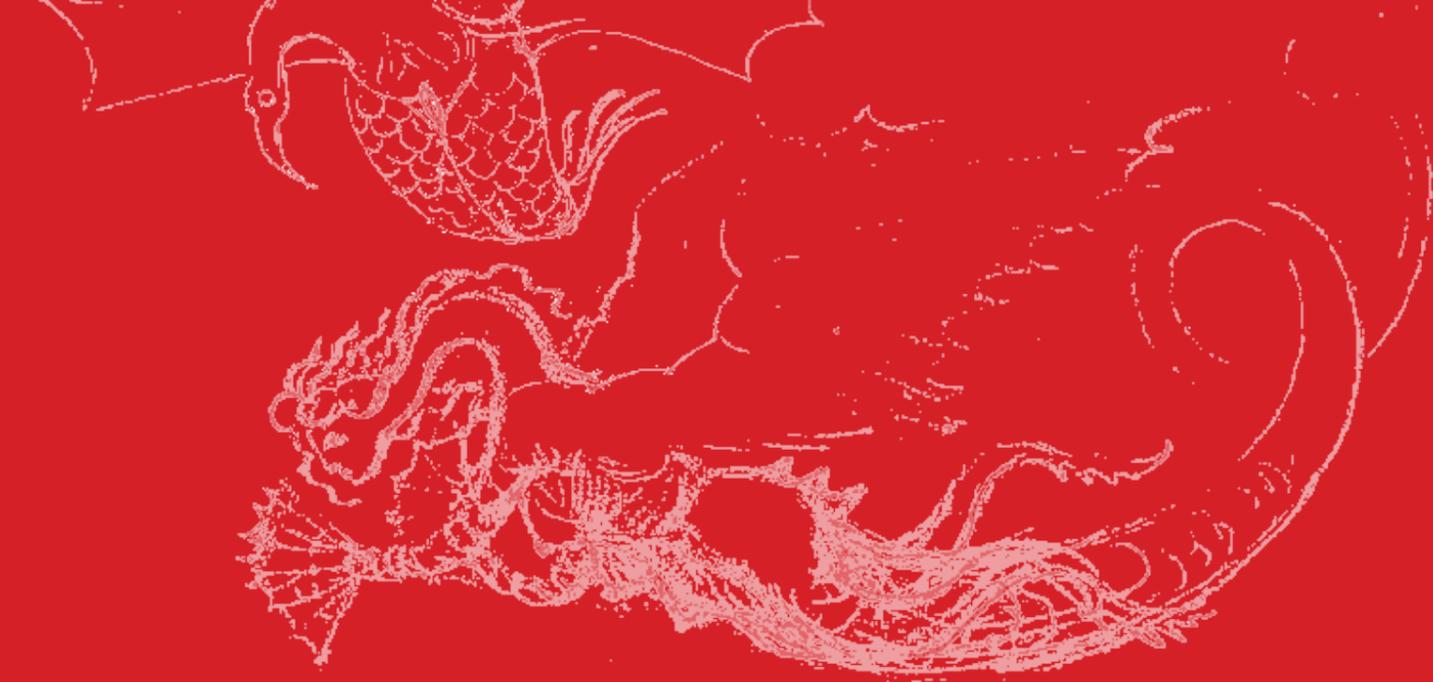
Vala incircle round the furnaces where Luvah was clos'd
In joy she heard his howlings, & forgot he was her Luvah
With whom she walk'd in bliss, in times of innocence & youth

Hear ye the voice of Luvah from the furnaces of Urizen

If I indeed am Valas King, & ye O sons of Men
The workmanship of Luvah's hands; in times of Everlasting
When I call'd forth the Earth-worm from the cold & dark obscure
I nurtur'd her I fed her with my rains & dews, she grew
A scaled Serpent, yet I fed her tho' she hated me
Day after day she fed upon the mountains in Luvah's sight
I thought her thro' the Wilderness, a dry & thirsty land
And I command'd springs to rise for her in the black desert
Till she became a Dragon wing'd bright & poisonous
I open'd all the floodgates of the heavens to quench her thirst

Annise Rogers





In the past few years William Blake has become a central feature to my life, and not just because he is the focus of my Ph.D. Like many others, I came to Blake through his poetry so finding out that he was primarily an engraver and artist really made me reconsider how I viewed him and his works. When I first read *Vala, or The Four Zoas* I had never read any Blake scholarship and therefore had no idea that it was an incomplete manuscript poem. Even lacking an academic background, or maybe even precisely because of this, I was enthralled by the poem's twisting narrative and multi-layered plot and characters. You can imagine my horror when I first saw a digital copy of the manuscript, with all the erasures to the visual artwork that had taken place after Blake's death.

One of the problems with the drawings on the manuscript is that they do not always correspond with what is happening in the text. We see this throughout Blake's published works too – a good example might be the 'Swan-woman' on plate 11 of *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*. However, in *The Four Zoas* this is all the more complicated by its status as a manuscript poem, where the pictures might be the proofs for *Night Thoughts*, practice drawings for other works, or even half-formed doodles. I want to talk about one page of the manuscript, and a single sketch in particular, which I believe shows the ultimate depiction of the eponymous Vala (for whom this magazine is named). Vala is the Emanation of Luvah, one of the four Zoas, and

One of the problems with the drawings on the manuscript is that they do not always correspond with what is happening in the text

she is sometimes said to portray nature. Her role in *The Four Zoas* is complex, but simply put, she rejects Luvah and instead takes Urizen (another Zoa) as her king.

Page 26 of the manuscript is particularly odd thanks to the sketches Blake drew on it. The small butterfly-winged woman at the top left has had her lower body erased, whilst the cherub underneath her was obviously once carrying a huge erect penis (only partially erased). It is not just what was erased that is important on this page, however, but also what was not. The strange bird-headed, dragon-mermaid with a visible vagina has been left completely unaltered, as has the half-dragon, half-woman below her.

It is this dragon-woman that I wish to focus on here. Her neck has been elongated but still has a human head, her arms lead to scaled wing-like or webbed hands devoid of human fingers. Her bare chest displays breasts and large leathery wings protrude from her shoulders. She appears to be in some state of metamorphosis, made even more clear by the lower half of her body which shows two thigh-like shapes in the process of becoming more tail-like, superimposed over a thick, curling tail appendage which also descends from her waist. This drawing shows neither woman nor dragon-like creature but an amalgamation of the two; a character in a state of change, suspended at that moment where they are neither human nor monster.

This could merely be a portrayal of Sin from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but I believe that is too simple an interpretation. Although I stated earlier that the visual art of *The Four Zoas* can be difficult because it does not always correspond clearly with the text, here I would argue that this metamorphosing woman-dragon does link to the poetry, though the other sketches on the page do not appear to do so in the same way. In the following passage from 'Night the Second', Vala has locked Luvah in a furnace and is melting him into liquid metal until only his feet remain. She has forgotten her Zoa and is unaware that, by destroying him, she is ultimately destroying herself:

Here ye the voice of Luvah from the furnaces of Urizen

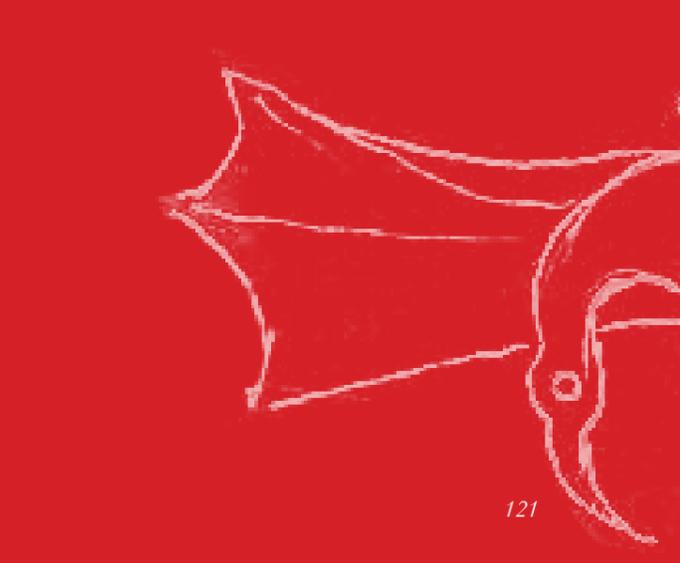
If I am indeed Valas King
 [...]

 When I called forth the Earth-worm from the cold & dark obscure
 I nurturd her I fed her with my rains & dew, she grew
 A scaled Serpent, yet I fed her tho' she hated me
 [...]

 Till she became a Dragon winged bright & poisonous
 (*The Four Zoas*, 'Night the Second', p. 26, ll. 4-5,7-9, 13, E317; my emphasis)

These words show the development of Luvah's Emanation Vala from 'Earth-worm' to 'Dragon'. It has always appeared to me that this speech and the woman-dragon sketch are irrevocably linked – that the dragon-woman was not Vala, but Vala as Luvah sees and remembers her; the entirety of Vala throughout the whole of her life shown in a single sketch. Images of Vala are not common in Blake's works, and when she does appear in artistic form she is always presented as a female and human, and usually wearing a veil, which could be seen to play on her name 'veil-la' (one of the two possible pronunciations).

This image of Vala in *The Four Zoas* fascinates me because of the movement, fluidity, or time-overlap that it suggests. This dragon-Vala in the middle of her transformation (whether to woman from dragon, or to dragon from woman) portrays, in a single, rough drawing the complexity of the workings of plot and time in *The Four Zoas* that, even in over 4,000 lines of written poetry, Blake never quite managed to achieve.



Reviews and Notices

Mary Wollstonecraft's Lost Letter, Found

Sibylle Erle

Illustration by John Riordan

The following is a fictitious letter that was inspired by Janet Todd's 'speculative reconstruction' of fragments from letters written to the Swiss-born, English painter Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) by a love-sick Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). Todd, editor of *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (2003), explains that 'Knowles [Fuseli's biographer] printed brief excerpts from Wollstonecraft's many letters to the Fuselis (originals now lost) [...]; all are undated but were probably written late in 1792' (2003: 205). Fuseli kept Wollstonecraft's letters in his pocket not because he cherished her, but because she wrote to him so much that he never opened her missives. John Knowles (1781-1841), who published his three-volume biography in 1831, was also cruel if not insulting in his summary of Fuseli's rejection of Wollstonecraft: 'Fuseli found in her (what he most disliked in woman) a philosophical sloven: her usual dress being a habit of coarse cloth, such as is now worn by milk-women, black worsted stockings, and a beaver hat, with her hair hanging lank about her shoulders' (1831: 165).

That Fuseli may have been the main reason for Wollstonecraft to escape to France for what was going to be a period of two years is attested to in William Godwin's *Memoirs* (1798): 'One of her principal inducements to this step, related, I believe, to Mr. Fuseli' (Godwin). Godwin, who had lost Wollstonecraft to puerperal fever, wrote clouded by grief but also second hand — and he presents his late wife as 'a female Werter [sic]', noting that 'she perceived too late, that, by continually impressing on her mind fruitless images of unreserved affection and domestic felicity, it only served to give new pungency to the sensibility that was destroying her' (Godwin 1798). We cannot, however, be certain that Mary told her husband everything. Godwin, in addi-

tion, wrote and published *Memoirs* shortly after Wollstonecraft's untimely death, when he was deeply upset and grieving. There was hardly time to talk to her family or deliberate in detail what happened to Wollstonecraft before she met and married Godwin.

Wollstonecraft and Fuseli first met at the publisher Joseph Johnson's house and probably as early as 1788, which is the year Fuseli married Sophia Rawlins, a much younger and very stylish wife. Wollstonecraft and Fuseli met at Johnson's dinner parties and would have looked at Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781), discussing the new versions of the painting that he was then working on. *The Nightmare* is ripe with symbolism. While the work may represent Fuseli's ideal woman, I wonder what Wollstonecraft saw when she looked at it. The assumption is that when Wollstonecraft left for France, to see the Revolution first-hand, she was hankering after him. The made-up letter imagines that Mary wrote to Blake as a friend. They, too, had met at Johnson's. When looking at Fuseli's *Nightmare*, Wollstonecraft, I believe, saw in this eroticised image a symbol of women's lifeless and unconscious habits. The weight of the incubus serves as a referent for an oppressed state of mind.

London, 13 December 1792

Dear Will,

I am done with all that noisy talk about the Revolution at Johnson's. I have not heard about any changes and feel deep disappointment and think that I have no alternative but to travel to France where I hope to begin a new life. I have packed my bags and intend to never return to London.

The favour I ask of you concerns our friend Fuseli. He is admired for his talent and fame, but I can see now that he is a shallow little man who has held me captive. He has been squatting



on my chest like that horrid creature in the painting Johnson loves so much. I can see how his hand swooped across the canvas, slicing the flesh of that woman who is all but an empty vessel. I can no longer tolerate it.

It hurts so much. Have I not rushed to Johnson's house, abandoning my work in mid-sentence? He used to arrive early, and with Johnson busy welcoming his other guests, I could snatch a few moments. Time and again his attitude was one of reproof and belittlement. First with looks and then with words. My own words could not put a stop to it; he has been toying with me and now I must leave. I have shaken him off. I have healed my own mind and learned what I believe other women should be educated about.

I wish I had never committed my deepest thoughts about him to paper. Might he not hand you my letters? Would you try him for me? I simply could not bear anyone to think that I am in love with him.

Forever yours,

Mary

PS: Please commit my words to your heart and burn this letter.

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St Maud – Review

John Riordan

Saint Maud is a taut, psychological horror film from first time director, Rose Glass. It stars Morfydd Clark as the eponymous Maud, an agency nurse who is assigned to care for terminally ill patient, Amanda, a former dancer and hell-raiser played by the luminous Jennifer Ehle (who, among other things, will always be my Elizabeth Bennet). Maud is a recent religious convert and, as her fervour grows and twists into something altogether less savoury, she sets her sights on saving Amanda's soul before she departs this world. The Blake connection comes when Amanda gifts Maud a Morton D. Paley book on Blake. She is taken by his artwork and the little that she learns of Blake's fiercely personal take on religion, and soon his apocalyptic

spiritual imagery is incorporated into Maud's religious psychodrama. One can't help but feel a little bit sorry for Blake. Why is it that he is always brought in to 'inspire' the psychopaths and serial killers of cinema? The most obvious comparison is to *Red Dragon*'s Francis Dolarhyde, who kills innocents in order to transform himself into Blake's monster (bad enough), and then, to the horror of Blake scholars, goes on to eat the original artwork! John Higgs's *William Blake Now: Why He Matters More than Ever* (2019) has an excellent chapter in which he explains the appeal of Blake's imagery to film makers, heavy metal bands and computer game designers looking to inject a bit of gothic, brooding melodrama.

This is not a criticism of *Saint Maud*, which is whip smart and genuinely disturbing. If Blake is ever so slightly used as window dressing then Glass's moody direction makes his art look fabulous, and she clearly knows enough about Blake to show us that Maud is not getting the message. Though she thinks herself a saint she is a lost soul, and she completely misses the point of Blake.

Her religious zeal is a response to trauma, but instead of embracing the restorative power of imagination she makes Blake's angels and demons part of her shrine to martyrdom and suffering, with a very un-Blakean focus on mortification of the flesh. Blake's angels and demons part of her shrine (literally) to martyrdom and suffering, with a very un-Blakean focus on the mortification of the flesh. 'Never waste your pain' she says at one point. Her idea of religion is to fulfil the demands and pass the cruel tests of a disembodied voice.

As the film reaches its inevitably grisly conclusion, it begs the question, what separates one person's prophetic inspiration from another's dangerous delusion? In the realm of personal spirituality, how can we distinguish the Poetic Genius from psychosis? Should we judge by their outcome alone?

Saint Maud is a great film, featuring an astonishing central performance from Clark as the twitchy, malevolent nurse. It is scary but beautiful to look at, filmed in alternately rich and sickly hues, and with a final scene that will stay burned into your

imagination. As a Blake fan, one can't help but wish for a film in which exposure to his work steers a troubled soul away from the darkness and towards the light.

Saint Maud, Directed by Rose Glass, 2020





Rachel V. Billigheimer

Dancing Toward Eternity

Josephine A. McQuail

The Canadian Blake and Yeats scholar Rachel Billigheimer passed away on 6 April 2013 with no published notices of her passing in literary circles, despite the fact that she was a major Blake and Yeats scholar; her *Wheels of Eternity* (1990), comparing symbolism in Blake and Yeats, is still a groundbreaking study. Her monograph built upon research done for her dissertation at York University and won many accolades. Citations of her work appear in journals published all over the world and the book is cited by international scholars from many countries, including Korea, Hungary, France, China, the UK, Canada, the US, Brazil, and the Republic of Ireland.

Dr Billigheimer was also a long-time participant in the Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA) conference. Dr Billigheimer's 'Conflict and Conquest: Creation, Emanation and the Female in Blake's Mythology' was part of a cluster of papers given at NeMLA on Blake and the Female and published in *Modern Language Studies* in 2000.

Scholar Rod Tweedy paid tribute to her work in his wonderful adaptation of her 'The Eighth Eye: Prophetic Vision in Blake's Poetry and Design' in *The*

Human Divine, an online publication meant to 'explore and promote Blake's ideas about spirituality, especially his radical take on Christianity' (Tweedy). Dr Tweedy had been unaware of Dr Billigheimer's death, and he was saddened by the news, calling her work 'terrific'. The November 2019 *The Human Divine* with the beautiful and apropos images added to the original article very tangibly expresses his appreciation for the original, which appeared in the *Colby Quarterly* in 1996.

Dr Billigheimer was a long-time lecturer at McMaster University. Despite her distinguished scholarship, she was an adjunct faculty, a position women not uncommonly find themselves in. Nonetheless Rachel worked on, fulfilling her teaching duties and leaving an enduring mark on scholarship.

After emigrating to Canada from Australia, where her husband Claude Billigheimer's father had fled during the Nazi occupation of Germany (Apple 2008), Drs Rachel and Claude Billigheimer continued being devout Jews, active in the Jewish community and temple in Hamilton, Ontario. Dr Claude Billigheimer also established Maimonides College, a Jewish tertiary institution, where his wife taught as well.

Dr Rachel Billigheimer's careful scholarship has made a lasting contribution to both Yeats and Blake studies. In 2012, at the age of 80, she chaired an international session on Yeats and Asia at the IASIL conference in Montreal; she also gave a paper on Samuel Beckett. Besides the titles already mentioned, notable articles include 'Tragedy and Transcendence in the Dance Plays of W. B. Yeats' in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Culture* and 'The Ritual Dance in Yeats's Drama *A Full Moon in March*' in *The Maynooth Review/Reviú Mhá Nuad*.

I will let Dr Rachel Billigheimer have the last word, that her 'dance' may go on. From 'Tragedy and Transcendence in the Dance Plays of W. B. Yeats': 'Dance, symbolizing destructive human passions which prohibit the individual's entry into the luminous circle of perfection [is] employed analogously in the work of both poets [Blake and Yeats] [...] Yeats, in his final vision, urges the fulfilment of sensual experience, acclaiming heroic suffering through tragedy as creative joy, which transcends the world of time' (1999: 247).

Note: Rachel's beloved Claude passed away on 15 December 2020, in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Now they are both dancing in eternity. Photos: McMaster Women's Club Archives

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