

There Is No Natural Religion¹

[b]

I. Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover.

II. Reason, or the ratio² of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more.

[III lacking]

IV. The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round even of a universe would soon become a mill with complicated wheels.

V. If the many become the same as the few when possess'd, More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul. Less than All cannot satisfy Man.

VI. If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot.

VII. The desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite.

Application. He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.

Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.

1788

FROM SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE¹

SHEWING THE TWO CONTRARY STATES OF THE HUMAN SOUL.

FROM SONGS OF INNOCENCE

Introduction

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

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

1. In this document Blake presents his assertions (in opposition to those in the preceding tract) that knowledge is not limited to the physical senses, but is as unbounded as the infinite desires of humankind and its godlike capacity for infinite vision.

2. In Latin *ratio* signifies both "reason" and "calculation." Blake applies the term derogatorily to the 18th-century concept of reason as a calculating faculty whose operations are limited to sense perceptions.

1. *Songs of Innocence* was etched in 1789, and in 1794 was combined with additional poems under the title *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*; this collection was reprinted at various later times with varying arrangements of the poems. In his songs of innocence Blake assumes the stance that he is writing "happy songs / Every child may joy to hear," but they do not all depict an innocent and happy world; many of them incorporate injustice,

evil, and suffering. These aspects of the fallen world, however, are represented as they appear to a "state" of the human soul that Blake calls "innocence" and that he expresses in a simple pastoral language, in the tradition both of Isaac Watts' widely read *Divine Songs for Children* (1715) and of the picture books for child readers pioneered by mid-18th-century booksellers such as John Newbery. The vision of the same world, as it appears to the "contrary" state of the soul that Blake calls "experience," is an ugly and terrifying one of poverty, disease, prostitution, war, and social, institutional, and sexual repression, epitomized in the ghastly representation of modern London. Though each stands as an independent poem, a number of the songs of innocence have a matched counterpart, or "contrary," in the songs of experience. Thus "Infant Joy" is paired with "Infant Sorrow" and the meek "Lamb" reveals its other aspect of divinity in the flaming, wrathful "Tyger."

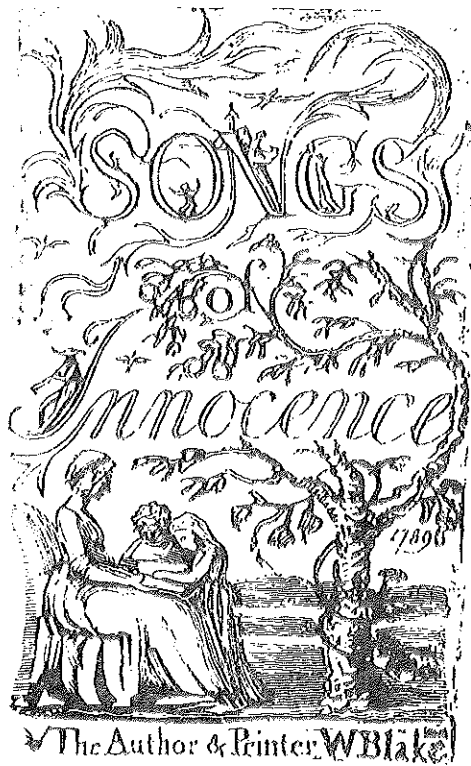


Piper
So I piped

On a cloud
I saw a child,
And he laughing
said to me,

Pipe a song
about a Lamb;

So I piped
with merry cheer;



Separate title page for *Songs of Innocence* (1789), *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, plate 3, copy C, ca. 1801.

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

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

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

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

1789

The Ecchoing Green

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring

To welcome the Spring,
 5 The sky-lark and thrush,
 The birds of the bush,
 Sing louder around,
 To the bells' cheerful sound,
 While our sports shall be seen
 10 On the Ecchoing Green.

Old John with white hair
 Does laugh away care,
 Sitting under the oak,
 Among the old folk.
 15 They laugh at our play,
 And soon they all say:
 Such, such were the joys,
 When we all, girls & boys,
 In our youth-time were seen,
 20 On the Ecchoing Green.

Till the little ones weary
 No more can be merry
 The sun does descend,
 And our sports have an end:
 25 Round the laps of their mothers,
 Many sisters and brothers,
 Like birds in their nest,
 Are ready for rest;
 And sport no more seen,
 30 On the darkening Green.

The Lamb¹

Little Lamb, who made thee?
 Dost thou know who made thee?
 Gave thee life & bid thee feed,
 By the stream & o'er the mead;
 5 Gave thee clothing of delight,
 Softest clothing wooly bright;
 Gave thee such a tender voice,
 Making all the vales rejoice!
 Little Lamb who made thee?
 10 Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
 Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
 He is called by thy name,
 For he calls himself a Lamb;
 15 He is meek & he is mild,
 He became a little child;

1. The opening of this poem mimes the form of the catechistic questions and answers customary for children's religious instruction.

Little Lamb
 We are all
 Little Lamb
 Little Lamb

The Lamb

My mother bore me in
 And I am black, but my
 White is an angel's
 My face black as a

My mother taught me
 And sitting down I
 She took me on her
 And I went to the

And the rising sun
 And his light
 And the flowers and the grass
 And the morning

And the sun and the moon
 And the stars and the
 And the clouds and the
 And the rain and the

And the wind and the
 And the snow and the
 And the ice and the
 And the frost and the

And the sun and the moon
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And the sun and the moon
 And the stars and the
 And the clouds and the
 And the rain and the

I a child & thou a lamb,
 We are callèd by his name.
 Little Lamb God bless thee.
 20 Little Lamb God bless thee.

1789

The Little Black Boy

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

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

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

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

For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear,
 The cloud will vanish; we shall hear his voice,
 Saying: Come out from the grove, my love & care,
 20 And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.

Thus did my mother say, and kissèd me;
 And thus I say to little English boy:
 When I from black and he from white cloud free,
 And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,

25 I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear
 To lean in joy upon our father's knee.
 And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
 And be like him, and he will then love me.

1789

The Chimney Sweeper

When my mother died I was very young,
 And my father sold me while yet my tongue
 Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!
 So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

The child's lisping attempt at the chimney sweeper's street cry, "Sweep! Sweep!"

5 There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd, so I said,
Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
10 As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open'd the coffins & set them all free:
15 Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
20 He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

1789

The Divine Image

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

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

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

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

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk, or Jew.

Where Mercy, Love, & Pity dwell,
 20 There God is dwelling too.

1789

Holy Thursday¹

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
 The children walking two & two, in red & blue & green;
 Grey headed beards² walkd before with wands as white as snow,
 Till into the high dome of Paul's they like 'Thames' waters flow.

O what a multitude they seemd, these flowers of London town!
 Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own.
 The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
 Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,
 Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among.
 Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor;
 Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.³

ca. 1784

1789

1789

Nurse's Song

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

5 Then come home my children, the sun is gone down
 And the dew of night arise;
 Come, come, leave off play, and let us away
 Till the morning appears in the skies.

No, no, let us play, for it is yet day
 10 And we cannot go to sleep;
 Besides, in the sky, the little birds fly
 And the hills are all coverd with sheep.

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

ca. 1784

1789

1. A special day during the Easter season when the poor (frequently orphaned) children of the charity schools of London—sometimes as many as 6,000—marched in a procession to a service at St. Paul's Cathedral.

2. Lower church officers, one of whose duties is to keep order.

3. Cf. Hebrews 13.2: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Infant Joy

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

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old,
Sweet joy I call thee;
10 Thou dost smile,
I sing the while—
Sweet joy befall thee.

1789

FROM SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

Introduction

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
5 That walk'd among the ancient trees;¹

Calling the lapsèd Soul²
And weeping in the evening dew,
That might controll³
The starry pole,
10 And fallen, fallen light renew!

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

Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor
The watry shore⁴
20 Is giv'n thee till the break of day.

1794

1. Genesis 3.8: "And [Adam and Eve] heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." "The Bard," or poet-prophet, whose imagination is not bound by time, has heard the voice of the Lord in Eden.
2. The syntax leaves it ambiguous whether it is "the Bard" or "the Holy Word" who calls to the

fallen ("lapsèd") soul and to the fallen earth to stop the natural cycle of light and darkness.

3. The likely syntax is that "Soul" is the subject of "might controll."

4. In Blake's recurrent symbolism the starry sky ("floor") signifies rigid rational order and the sea signifies chaos.





Separate title page for *Songs of Experience* (1794), *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, plate 29, copy Z, ca. 1801.

Earth's Answer¹

Earth rais'd up her head,
 From the darkness dread & drear.
 Her light fled:
 Stony dread!
 5 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
 10 I hear the Father of the ancient men.²

Selfish father of men,
 Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!
 Can delight
 Chain'd in night
 15 The virgins of youth and morning bear?

¹The Earth explains why she, the natural world, cannot by her unaided endeavors renew the fallen

²This is the character that Blake later named

"Urizen" in his prophetic works. He is the tyrant who binds the mind to the natural world and also imposes a moral bondage on sexual desire and other modes of human energy.

Does spring hide its joy
 When buds and blossoms grow?
 Does the sower
 Sow by night,
 20 Or the plowman in darkness plow?

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

1794

The Clod & the Pebble

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

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

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

1794

Holy Thursday

Is this a holy thing to see,
 In a rich and fruitful land,
 Babes reduced to misery,
 Fed with cold and usurous hand?

5 Is that trembling cry a song?
 Can it be a song of joy?
 And so many children poor?
 It is a land of poverty!

10 And their sun does never shine,
 And their fields are bleak & bare,
 And their ways are fill'd with thorns;
 It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,
 And where-e'er the rain does fall,

- 15 Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

1794

The Chimney Sweeper

A little black thing among the snow
Crying 'weep, 'weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father & mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

1794

- 5 Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winter's snow;
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

- 10 And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

1791-92

1794

Nurse's Song

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

1794

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

1794

The Sick Rose

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

- 5 Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

1794

The Tyger¹

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

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

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

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

20 When the stars threw down their spears²
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

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

1794

1790-92

My Pretty Rose Tree

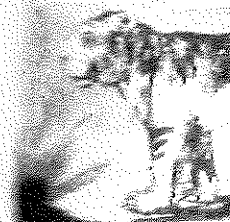
A flower was offerd to me;
Such a flower as May never bore,
But I said, I've a Pretty Rose-tree,
And I passed the sweet flower o'er.

5 Then I went to my Pretty Rose-tree,
To tend her by day and by night.
But my Rose turnd away with jealousy,
And her thorns were my only delight.

1793

1. For the author's revisions while composing "The Tyger," see "Poems in Process," in the NAEL Archive.

2. "Threw down" is ambiguous and may signify that the stars either "surrendered" or "hurled down" their spears.





"The Tyger," *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, plate 52, copy C, ca. 1801.

794

Ah! Sun-flower

Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done;

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

1794

794

The Garden of Love

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

ify
led

5 And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
 And Thou shalt not writ over the door;
 So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
 That so many sweet flowers bore,

10 And I saw it was filled with graves,
 And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
 And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
 And binding with briars my joys & desires.

1794

London

I wander thro' each charter'd¹ street,
 Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
 And mark in every face I meet
 Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

5 In every cry of every Man,
 In every Infants cry of fear,
 In every voice, in every ban,²
 The mind-forg'd manacles I hear:

10 How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
 Every blackning Church appalls,
 And the hapless Soldier's sigh
 Runs in blood down Palace walls.

15 But most thro' midnight streets I hear
 How the youthful Harlot's curse
 Blasts the new-born Infants tear,³
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.⁴

1794

The Human Abstract¹

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

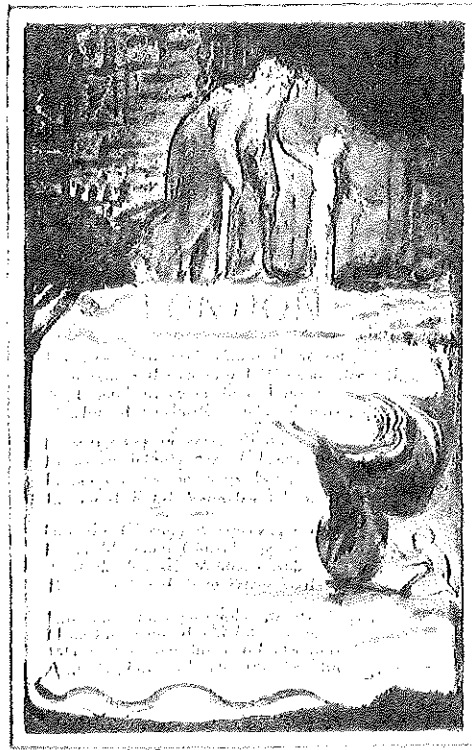
1. "Given liberty," but also, ironically, "preempted as private property, and rented out."

2. The various meanings of *ban* are relevant (political and legal prohibition, curse, public condemnation) as well as "banns" (marriage proclamation).

3. Most critics read this line as implying prenatal blindness, resulting from a parent's venereal disease (the "plagues" of line 16) by earlier infection from the harlot.

4. In the older sense: "converts the marriage bed into a bier." Or possibly, because the current sense of the word had also come into use in Blake's day, "converts the marriage coach into funeral hearse."

1. The matched contrary to "The Divine Image" in *Songs of Innocence*. The virtues of the earlier poem, "Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love," are now represented as possible marks for exploitation, cruelty, conflict, and hypocritical humility.



"London," *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, plate 51, copy C, ca. 1801.

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

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

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

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

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



"The Human Abstract," *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, plate 47 copy Y, 1825.

Infant Sorrow

My mother groand! my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt,
Helpless, naked, piping loud;
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

- 5 Struggling in my father's hands,
Striving against my swadling bands;
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.

179-

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

5 And I waterd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears;
And I sunnèd it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
10 Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole,
When the night had veild the pole;
15 In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretchd beneath the tree.

1794

To Tirzah¹

Whate'er is Born of Mortal Birth
Must be consumèd with the Earth
To rise from Generation free;
Then what have I to do with thee?²

5 The Sexes sprung from Shame & Pride,
Blow'd^o in the morn, in evening died;
But Mercy changd Death into Sleep;
The Sexes rose to work & weep.

blossomed

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

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

ca. 1805

A Divine Image¹

Cruelty has a Human Heart
And Jealousy a Human Face,

1. Tirzah was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, while Samaria was the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. In Blake's poem, which was added to late versions of *Songs of Experience*, Tirzah is represented as the "Mortal Part"—in the realm of material nature and "Mortal Life"—of the mortal body, with its associated passions.

2. Echoing the words of Christ to his mother at the marriage in Cana, John 2:4: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come."

1. Blake omitted this poem from all but one copy of *Songs of Experience*, probably because "The Human Abstract" served as a more comprehensive and subtle contrary to "The Divine Image" in *Songs of Innocence*.

Terror, the Human Form Divine,
And Secrecy, the Human Dress.

- 5 The Human Dress is forgèd Iron,
The Human Form, a fiery Forge,
The Human Face, a Furnace seal'd,
The Human Heart, its hungry Gorge.² *mouth, stomach*

1790-91

The Book of Thel Although Blake dated the etched poem 1789, its composition probably extended to 1791, so that he was working on it at the time he was writing the *Songs of Innocence* and some of the *Songs of Experience*. *The Book of Thel* treats the same two "states"; now, however, Blake employs the narrative instead of the lyrical mode and embodies aspects of the developing myth that was fully enacted in his later prophetic books. And like the major prophecies, this poem is written in the fourteener, a long line of seven stresses.

Thel is represented as a virgin dwelling in the Vales of Har, which seems equivalent to the sheltered state of pastoral peace and innocence in Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. Here, however, Thel feels useless and unfulfilled and appeals for comfort, unavailingly, to various beings who are contented with their roles in Har. Finally, the Clay invites Thel to try the experiment of assuming embodied life. Part 4 (plate 6) expresses the brutal shock of the revelation to Thel of the experience of sexual desire—a revelation from which she flees in terror back to her sheltered, if unsatisfying, existence in Har.

Some commentators propose that Thel is an unborn soul who rejects the ordeal of an embodied life in the material world. Others propose that Thel is a human virgin who shrinks from experiencing a life of adult sexuality. It is possible, however, to read Blake's little myth as comprehending both these areas of significance. The reader does not need to know Blake's mythology inside and out to recognize the broad symbolic reach of this poem in ordinary human experience—the elemental failure of nerve to meet the challenge of life as it is, the timid incapacity to risk the conflict, physicality, pain, and loss without which there is no possibility either of growth or of creativity.

The Book of Thel

PLATE 1¹

Thel's Motto

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?
Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or Love in a golden bowl?²

1. The plate numbers identify the page, each with its own pictorial design, as originally printed by Blake. These numbers are reproduced here because they are frequently used in references to Blake's writings.

2. Ecclesiastes 12.5-6 describes a time when

"fears shall be in the way . . . and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken." Perhaps Blake changed the silver cord to a rod to make it, with the golden bowl, a sexual symbol.