

The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake Study Guide

**The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake by
William Blake**

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Contents

[The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Book 1, Introductions : Chapter 1, Preface into Section I.....3](#)

[Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 2, Visions of the Daughters of Albion.....5](#)

[Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 3, Milton.....7](#)

[Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 4, Jerusalem.....9](#)

[Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 5, Jerusalem Cont.....11](#)

[Book 2, Book 2 : Chapter 1, For the Sexes.....13](#)

[Book 3, Book 3 : Chapter 1, Unengraved Prophetic Works.....15](#)

[Book 4, Book 4 : Chapter 1, The Four Zoas.....17](#)

[Book 4, Book 4 : Chapter 2, The Four Zoas Cont.....18](#)

[Book 5, Book 5 : Chapter 1, Poetical Sketches.....20](#)

[Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 1, Island in the Moon.....22](#)

[Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 2, Satiric Verses.....24](#)

[Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 3, The Design of the Last Judgment.....26](#)

[Book 7, Book 7 : Chapter 1, Inscriptions.....28](#)

[Book 7, Book 7 : Chapter 2, Misc. & Letters.....29](#)

[Characters.....30](#)

[Objects/Places.....33](#)

[Themes.....37](#)

[Style.....40](#)

[Quotes.....44](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....45](#)



Book 1, Introductions : Chapter 1, Preface into Section I

Book 1, Introductions : Chapter 1, Preface into Section I Summary

The edition used to produce this summary is the Newly Revised Edition of The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake. It was considered a monumental success when this complete edition of the author's work was first assembled in 1965.

This work begins with a Preamble by scholars. The author's private notes and collection have been gleaned to bring this work together. In addition, modern technology such as infra-red photography has been applied in order to make discovery and rediscovery of some parts of William Blake's artworks possible. Also included are works that have only been published posthumously. Blake, as the author's letters explain near the end of the book, is one of the most famous artists in recent history to have held "a day job" during much of his adult life. He was a printer and painter by profession, and an author and poet after hours. He was very gifted.

It is with great enthusiasm that the scholars and publishers have been able to compile this veritable tome of William Blake's creative writings. The works have not been arranged in chronological order but by the type of writing that they are.

In the first section, Blake sets forth arguments and principles pertaining to his beliefs and perception of truth. Here is philosophy, both metaphysics (that which goes beyond physics) and epistemology (knowledge, what it is and how we know what we know). Blake tells readers that all Poetic Genius comes from one source, and only appears in various individuals through the same means. The forms they enter into, he claims are those known as Angels and Demons. He tells readers that knowledge is derived from experimentation and experience. He refers to "faculties," which in this case is a reference to "operations of the mind." Shortly thereafter, it becomes clear he has set forth two different arguments, each of which is powerful and has dissimilar implications. One is that the sense organs are reliable sources for discerning the truth, and that morality is an effect of education rather than being rooted in nature. The second is that the imagination is the true source of discerning the Truth. The former uses the mind with science and logic, and experience. The second may well perform these same operations but ultimately views the activities of the mind more freely. Blake shares his conclusive view on this for the first time in the book when he writes, "Application: He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the ratio sees himself only," (p. 3).

What follows is a work titled The Book of Thel. This is an entire story written in poetic verse about a little girl and her feelings. By writing this way, the author is perpetuating the more classical tradition of versified narrative. This is a fine tradition originally



devised to simplify story telling in an oral tradition by using verse forms themselves as mnemonic devices. Whether inspired by Homer, in the ancient Grecian tradition, or the Druids in the British tradition, William Blake turns his hand at the metered short fiction poem.

There is another change of form at the end of this section—a sizable set of poems known as the Songs of Innocence and Experience that have been brought together here. There are 27 songs of innocence alone, with children and angels as major themes. The very first of the Songs of Experience is entitled Bard.

After these poems there is yet another transition. Here, the metaphysical trend continues. There are two pages of prose, which are devoted to an imaginary conversation between William Blake and two of the Jewish prophets. From there, he moves on to Memorable Fancy, a piece of spiritually dedicated prose with a philosophical bent.

The first chapter of William Blake's writings concludes with, "One Law for the Lion and Ox is oppression," (p. 44) reminding readers that there are times when the only way to be fair is for rules to differ.

Book 1, Introductions : Chapter 1, Preface into Section I Analysis

The writer is obviously a spiritual and philosophical man. A diverse writer and a printer, Blake is also a poet; The Songs of Innocence and Experience are all formed in accord with formal verse rules.

Blake writes, "Always be ready to speak your mind, and a base man will avoid you," (p. 36). This is suggestive about the intensity and sincerity with which the author expresses his views throughout his writings.

The author comments that God and the gods, however they are presented to humanity, are simultaneously accurately reflective of a reality, and yet all reside within the human heart. This follows his belief that the Imagination and the spiritual mind has precedence over what he later refers to as "vegetative and generative." Blake believes that experience is the greatest teacher.

The most powerful quality of his writings is its vividness. The images in his poetry are easy to envision. This, along with their sound and form, makes them excellent. By the end of this first section of Blake's writings, readers have been introduced to four of his written forms: two types of poetry, and two forms of his prose.



Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 2, Visions of the Daughters of Albion

Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 2, Visions of the Daughters of Albion Summary

Here readers are introduced to the explicitly visionary quality of much of Blake's work. He brings up Albion, which is the ancient name of his homeland, England. There is no chapter break in the main body of the text, but there is a new heading for this section.

He mimics what is found in the first plate: he states that there is an argument.

What is decidedly different about this is that instead of the argument being a single statement, as it was on the first illuminated print, it is an entire short poem.

The author shares his worldliness through his art. He mentions other lands, including America, and the native tribal peoples of the Americas. He uses hexameter a great deal during this portion of the text. William Blake has gone so far as to write prophecies. His first one is called Prophecy for America, featuring a red Orc as a female character.

Following the prophecy are songs of Los and then a Book of Urizen. These are both fictional forces but, like the creature of Beowulf, may well indicate something real. The lengths of the stanzas in the book of Urizen range from 2 lines to 8 lines long. This is followed by a segment dedicated to the emergence of the first female form. This is followed another poetic Book named for Ahania. This is followed by one dedicated to the villain known as Los.

Reality enters into the vision again, as William Blake next writes about two "books" related to the writings of Milton, a classic Renaissance poet. In all of these cases "book" is not an accurate indicator of length, as we find in normal prose cases, but rather refers to completeness of subject matter. The work is another set of verses, extremely visual and visionary, that passionately describe a sequence of events during the struggle of good and evil amongst those dwelling upon the Earth.

Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 2, Visions of the Daughters of Albion Analysis

"Mark well my words! They are of your eternal salvation," (p. 96). This quote occurs repeatedly during the writings of the second chapter. It gives clear insight into the tone of the artist's work throughout this section.



William Blake mythologizes his homeland by presenting his works within the setting of Albion. He intermingles fantasy-oriented fiction together with historical fact, thereby fusing the two in his mind.

The author confounds readers with his prophecies by his marriage of Imagination with Truth.

Blake introduces readers to ideas of Hell and to demons when he writes, "Eternals...turning away from Eternals...sitting in a black cloud...In perturb'd pain and dismal torment," (p. 87). This appears in the Book of Urizen, in which Urizen figures quite prominently. The evil ones are described as being the same as the angriest of ones. Regardless of whether or not their rage was initiated by some legitimate cause, here they are depicted mainly as suffering from and through their own anger.

The writer and thinker shares more of his ideas when he explains that there are three types of men, and that one of these delights in destruction but the other two do not.

Along with the pleasures of stylish writing and drawing, William Blake shares his beliefs. Whether or not these beliefs emerged as an experiment or express the results of trial and error is uncertain.



Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 3, Milton

Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 3, Milton Summary

The Englishman continues his exposition with two "books" which include Milton. These perpetuate the ideas and theme that have been introduced in the preceding sections. Urizen and Los both figure largely in these books, which have been produced in impressive and precise verse forms.

He uses colorful language during this portion. He strikes fear into the hearts of readers, as he often cries out to Satan, if only to make some objection to the sequence of events.

Through the continuing hexameter poetic stanzas, the tale continues. It becomes clear that Blake is discussing an incredibly potent spiritual transformation. He is writing about the puzzle of transforming the human being into the incorruptible spiritual form Jesus Christ exemplified and taught was possible. He feels that the resurrection must be true, and that there is something about this that relates to the reality of the Imagination and the mind as spirit. For the mind as spirit is able to make resurrection a truth the masses can perceive, even if they are not manifesting it themselves. Blake does not shy away from the teaching that at some point there will be a fundamental division: there will be those resurrected into their incorruptible forms, and those who die to eternity.

The author has written with such vivid images that even readers uninterested in his spiritual vision can enjoy it as pure literature. Part of the story line is that there is work that takes six thousand years to complete. The evil ones participate in this while the good ones have nothing to do with it. Blake enjoys having characters that pursue this demonic errand to tie man to eternal death, by connecting him with generation and vegetation rather than to the spirit.

Another aspect of life that the author brings up in these two books is the realization that it is true that contraries can exist together, whereas negations like contradictions do not coexist. Within the context of these creative pieces, the author here informs readers that the land of Beulah is the name for the location where contraries coexist.

Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 3, Milton Analysis

Blake shows his ability to write self-contained works during these two pieces. He continues to create excellent poetic verses. He is happy to connect his work to other relevant poets, in this case Milton.

The writer and printer also reveals his power to further what is becoming something of a familiar universe. Readers are being repeatedly exposed to the characters of Urizen and Los. These powers continue to struggle, along with the more famous entities such



as Satan and God, with the world as Blake describes it. Again, Blake is intent on pursuing the spiritual train of thought.

By this time, the author's interest in the spiritual and philosophical is repetitious. His proficiency in hexameter verse is also clear.

The author advances his reputation with the books of Milton. Each can be taken in itself, but they make an excellent matching set. As poetry, these are modern, unique and rather timeless, created on illuminated plates.



Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 4, Jerusalem

Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 4, Jerusalem Summary

Here the author has created another work designed to be complete in itself. The author gives some account of his intentions in the heading that he uses, when he refers to the city as an emanation.

The setting is Albion. This entire work may best be understood as a cultural and psychological piece. England was quite strong as a nation during Blake's lifetime and only became more so before it waned. However, Blake chooses to employ the ancient strength of the country as well. To do so, he calls upon the powers of his own nation as Albion, rather than Britain.

A natural side effect is that he conjures the powers of Druidry. This lore includes the perception that in a healthy Albion, with the Bards, Druids and mighty oak groves, the power is far greater than that strange, foreign land that harbors the city of Jerusalem. Further, the increasing power of England in the modern world readily overshadows the might of earthly Jerusalem. Blake delves into the difference between Christ's resurrected body of spirit and the generative and vegetative world. These words, generative and vegetative, seem to clearly refer to these same oaken groves.

This piece has been built in four chapters. This chapter of the book summary covers the first two chapters of Jerusalem. This work was all created on illuminated plates.

Blake refers to the Void in this section. There is one instance wherein he attempts to explain its connection to feminine and female "space" in contrast to male or masculine "space." He writes of the need to give and receive forgiveness.

The work is a prosaic mythologizing of England. His fictional characters emerge. Los is here the Master of the furnaces, the tortures caused by wrath and rage. This Los is described as being a living man even though he is an immortal. Los also has or functions as a Spectre. Deceit, and Negation are entangled with torments, errors and incorrect knowledge. In the second chapter, Los is also honored as the creator of spoken language.

Another new world is formed herein—Golgonooza.

A character named Rahab is a representative of the generative and fleshly world. How the spiritual world overcomes or subsumes that of the flesh without division within itself is unclear. How the spiritual body can be the truth, while sins, lack of forgiveness and falsehoods create the impression that the spirit and body may not be one, and that the material world takes precedence over and can control the spiritual, also remains unclear. Evidently, Christian doctrine explains this is a false appearance from which mankind suffers a great deal. It is the path to Eternal Death, the path which Blake's characters who tend the fires of torment are guarding.



Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 4, Jerusalem Analysis

The author uses complex imagery in his short story form of Jerusalem. There are a handful of supreme ideas in this piece of creative writing. One of these is that the author is creating a new mythic history of England, which he calls Albion. The activities of some primal, evil, forces are included: Los, Rahab and Urizen. Blake calls out to Jerusalem.

Blake reveals a psychological concern—even his ideas of Christianity are rooted in a linking of the mind and knowledge of Christ with Britain. Jerusalem is called an emanation of Britain. The political ascension of the British Isles over much of the remainder of the world creates a kind of cultural dominance, according to the writer-printer, of the English in the Middle East and therefore also Jerusalem. Given this attitude and worldview, Jerusalem becomes perceivable as an emanation of the ancient land of Albion, whose archaic and modern powers—oaken groves, druidic magic and wisdom—overtake the world with their splendor.

Along with this story line there are a few choice concepts the author uses. One of these is "the Spectre." This Spectre appears as if it is a separate entity or shadow at times. However, it is actually a totality of a given individual's awareness of every one of his or her sins, whether known or unknown by others.

William Blake insists to readers that the purpose and method of Christianity is conquest through constant forgiveness. This is a continual process.



Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 5, Jerusalem Cont.

Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 5, Jerusalem Cont. Summary

Here we have chapters 3 and 4 of Blake's Jerusalem. These also appear on illuminated plates. The author uses numerous references to deities at this time. The presentation is melodramatic. On one page the author is citing Albion and ranting about delusions, when a few pages later he connects the two by setting Albion, Canaan and Moab together in just a few short lines of poetry.

During these chapters, William Blake explains the Spectre further to readers. Here, he tells people that this entity is the reasoning power of man, when it is limited in ways that the Imagination is not.

The poetry itself continues to be perfectly formed. The stanza lengths vary from as little as 3 lines to more than 20. The words selected are highly emotive. By way of example, "Lest Hand the terrible destroy his Affectio. thou hidest her: / In chaste appearances or sweet deceits of love and modesty." Another example, "Cambel trembled with jealousy: she trembled! she envied! / The envy ran thro Cathedrons Looms into the Heart / of mild Jerusalem / Languishd upon Mount Olivet, East of mild Zions Hill," (p. 240).

Readers are advised that to take in the full sense of it, it might be best to read this more than once. The language is very colorful. The images and feelings are intense and incredible. The story continues to move along in its complexity. Thanks to his repetitions of certain thematic elements, the author is able to grow the tale while making the most of what he has invented so far.

Book 1, Book 1 : Chapter 5, Jerusalem Cont. Analysis

The author displays that he is a master of vivid poetic imagery. The spiritual visions continue, however strangely. For a few pages, they are interwoven into a segment of the story line but then a few pages later, they just turn up in a way that defies any sense of plot.

Blake shows great respect for women and girls during these chapters. Earlier in the work, he wrote of the pain of the emergence of the very first female form. He describes girls in individual poems. He writes of women here in the Jerusalem sections. The daughters of Albion are much loved by Blake.

These last two chapters complete the work entitled Jerusalem. During it, Blake has furthered the mythology surrounding his historical and fictive characters. He has also given exemplary poetic verses life and the inspiration of emotional drama. There is something visionary and ritualistic about the poet's writings. His word choice is lavish,

his phrases intense and potent. One quickly envisions these writings as theatrical works.



Book 2, Book 2 : Chapter 1, For the Sexes

Book 2, Book 2 : Chapter 1, For the Sexes Summary

This is an entirely different creative work by the author and include his visual art (he both draws and etches).

The label for this section of work is encouraging. Blake clearly has hope for peace and friendship between the sexes. He does repeatedly discuss the troubles caused by the co-mingling of love with jealousy. This theme, however, fades into the background during this sequence of images. Here is a happier time for love, and for man and woman.

Each illustration has been reproduced and printed in simple black and white for the book. The drawings have been reprinted at a rather small size. They are well crafted. The artist has combined a strong technical accuracy with a sense of style.

Each of these has a small inscription that goes along with it. Prior to the entire group there is a short poem that extols the virtues of mutual forgiveness.

There is a small amount of commentary accompanying these. The first is about Homer's poetry. Blake asserts that the sign of great poetry are that each poem is complete within itself. He also expresses that when a work has unity, this will show in its parts. Blake's own poetry is actually resplendent in this regard.

The etchings do not appear to have a sequential story line. They are drawings of people in various stages of life. The majority of the pictures show either males or females, rather than displaying the two together.

After the etchings there is a listing of the inscriptions which form one fine poem. He follows this with a short poem to the Devil, earning himself a reputation for repeatedly and directly addressed this entity as well as talking to God. Then he remarks upon the ancient artisans: Homer and Virgil. During his remarks on Virgil, he also brings up the ancient Roman poet Ovid, who wrote elegies on love.

The theme of forgiveness is emphasized during the last creative work by this author. This is a dialogue between Jehovah, Abel and Satan after Abel murders Cain from jealousy.

Book 2, Book 2 : Chapter 1, For the Sexes Analysis

These pages are devoted to the author's visual art.

The analysis of this section is brief, given the nature of this portion of Blake's work. He gives beautiful forms to language. Not only this, but Blake also provides ample criticism even of those whom he admires. Here he espouses more of his own beliefs, claiming with certainty that those states dedicated to war do not produce high quality art. He especially criticizes Rome during the Imperial era.



Book 3, Book 3 : Chapter 1, Unengraved Prophetic Works

Book 3, Book 3 : Chapter 1, Unengraved Prophetic Works Summary

This includes more than one section of text headed up by a set of Roman Numerals. In this case, the very first of these is Tiriell. Immediately, the author begins to share his personal beliefs with the readers. He asserts here, as he did earlier, that the Divine Body is the Imagination & the Poetic Genius. This is one of William Blake's most crucial beliefs.

The poetry is akin to some of his preceding works in that he has written a story in thick lines of perfectly metered poetic verse. The story is dramatic and involves powerful forces. The story opens when the King is mourning his wife who is dying. He calls their sons before the palace in his sorrow. He quickly turns darker and more symbolic, using the thought that his young do not even care. Shortly, the sad and perhaps frightened, paranoid or suspicious old man is speaking of serpents and curses.

The father and one or more sons dig the grave for the mother and bury her. This concludes the first section of this poem. The next portion commences with the grief-stricken King wandering off. He eventually comes upon others, but by the time he does he has cast off the guise of King and taken up that of a harmless, old wandering man. He meets people who can tell that he is Tiriell King of the West but they are also able to perceive that he is very upset and seems to be wandering about the land, inattentively and without specific purpose. When the new people feed him, he claims that the people of whom he is the father and was the King are all wicked ones.

Mnetha, is a the name of a woman who is with Heva and Har. These are the ones who take Tiriell in. They try to keep him with them, explaining that they will feed him and that he may stay. They feel this way he will make peace with life once again or that he will die in safety in their lands. The old King refuses, and insists that after they have fed him and shared company, they let him go.

Eventually, the old King winds his way back to his homeland, where he relies upon the help of his daughters. A great pestilence and other hardships befall his descendants but at last he assures his daughter that the curse that was upon them has been lifted. The story ends when King Tiriell returns to those who had helped him when he had been wandering the Earth in his affliction: Mnetha, Heva and Har.

What follows are poems named for the French Revolution. The author read at least some of the writings of Voltaire, the French novelist, and Rousseau, the French thinker. The poetry of these is quite a divergence from the rest in its structure. Rather than 10 line stanzas in tightly packed bundles of hexameter, this one exhibits individual lines so



long that each one wraps over the edge of a line to form a short portion of another. This causes the stanzas to have a long line, then one extremely short, then another over-long, then another extra short.

As usual, the poetry is dramatic. For example: "Clouds of wisdom prophetic reply, and roll over the palace roof heavy. / Forty men; each conversing with woes in the infinite shadows of his soul, / Like our ancient fathers in regions of twilight, walk, gathering round the King;" (p. 286). There are a variety of moving, short anecdotes about people amongst the French who are eager for the end of the monarchy. Along with these are lines which depict a sense of foreboding. Later, it is explained that a character named Necktar seeks to flee to Geneva. Further along, French nobles decide to face their challenge and to unite together. The art of diplomacy is described by Blake's line, "Let the Nation's Ambassador come among Nobles, like incense of the valley," (p. 295).

The writer Blake left this piece marked as a first book, but no others ever followed from it.

Book 3, Book 3 : Chapter 1, Unengraved Prophetic Works Analysis

The romance of social and temporal distance may have influenced how readers interpret this. For Europeans of Blake's time, aristocrats and monarchs were both very real. Monarchies were running into trouble. Kings, new republics, and Imperialism were all on the scene during the century between 1700 to 1800. Political changes were reflective of renewed awareness of the power of the people.

The author William Blake turned all of these realities to good use in the production of these poems. In this sense he honored both the romantic spirit found in most of the common people who fantasize about those of the top social classes. These same people often balk at the extent of responsibility and sacrifice that those ranks really require. At the same time, the regular people are quick to criticize when the leadership shows any signs of acting as badly and selfishly as they themselves might want to do. Blake makes the most of the drama.



Book 4, Book 4 : Chapter 1, The Four Zoas

Book 4, Book 4 : Chapter 1, The Four Zoas Summary

These poems focus upon a special torment—love and jealousy, particularly when found together.

This theme is handled during the Four Zoas. This is described keenly through two quotations. "She drave the Females away from Los / and Los drave all the Males from her away," (p. 305). This is amended, thematically, shortly thereafter with, "Thus Urizen spoke collected himself in awful pride / space / Art though visionary of Jesus the soft delusion of Eternity / Lo I am God the terrible destroyer and not the Savior," (p. 307). The poems are labeled in their sequence as "nights." During each night there are several events.

The stanzas of the first of these are ornate. The images that he creates continue to be deep and vivid. Altars made of brass are mentioned more than once. Another recurring image is of animals being taken by humans to serve their own purposes.

Book 4, Book 4 : Chapter 1, The Four Zoas Analysis

There is a story line to this set of poems as well. As has been observed in other cases, this one has a theme indicated by the title. The secondary title to these is "The Torments of Love and Jealousy in the Death and Judgment of Albion the Ancient Man." The first character is a woman, and there is the claim that an intellectual battle is about to be pursued.

The character Urizen comes up very early on as another starry immortal. Then there are characters who are associated with directions. These serve as narrative voices which the writer then works through. Due to the strength of the word choices, these have a feeling of oratory with large gestures, of speakers in high places. It is easy enough to see, based upon the manner in which Blake writes, any one of these displayed as a mortal in discourse with an entity located in one or more clouds.

Urizen on the very first night appears with a black, dark hail storm. Blake also uses weaving imagery and symbols. An immortal might fall into a woof. The author also makes direct references to God and Christianity. "Lo I am God the terrible destroyer and not the Saviour," (p. 307).



Book 4, Book 4 : Chapter 2, The Four Zoas Cont.

Book 4, Book 4 : Chapter 2, The Four Zoas Cont. Summary

This portion is devoted to the last of the Nights of the Four Zoas. Here the verses continue with their hexameters. Blake, while not mimicking the classical poet Homer, is certainly carrying on the tradition of excellence in poetry. None of these poems taken on their own or in the small groups are sufficient to constitute an entire epic. Their relation to the mystical and the divine also sets them apart from the epic in their form. So too does the fact that the subject matter is a shameless combination of truth and fantasy.

The author plants sexual truths into the verses of the second page.

During this part of the story Urizen descends. He uses his powers to enter and to traverse hells. Urizen is in the dark fiery regions. Perhaps it is the insides of volcanoes or the mind and heart consumed with tortuous rage or toiling through pain. Whatever its guise, the poet Blake takes readers to this spiritual space that somehow defies normal comprehension by giving the impression that it both exists and does not exist at the same time.

There is an instance here of a miracle. Blake's characters walk through fires, unscathed.

Blake completes this portion of the story by describing it as the end of a dream. He refers back to the world of sense experience, as people more easily agree with one another upon its qualities. With this, the series that comprise the Four Zoas have been brought to an end.

Book 4, Book 4 : Chapter 2, The Four Zoas Cont. Analysis

Here the author has integrated a refreshing version of the story of the serpent and the tree of life. During the Seventh Night, there is a bundle of images. Enitharmon elects to share truths regarding Eternity with other characters. Soon enough he says that Urizen was born of Vala; that he was the first of a series to be born of the process that Blake calls "Generation." Most readers will be puzzled since he is referring simply to reproduction but the way that he does suggests another manner altogether, somehow an error or a corruption caused by descent into attachments to the world when it confronts or confounds the Poetic Imagination and gives the appearance of being real and does so with resistance to the mind. If there were no resistance to the will or to the mind as people use it, then the material world would not be able to prove or to give the false appearance of being more real than what individuals think. Shape changing

becomes another power during this time. The likeness of Urizen transforms into a serpent that moves along the tree of Mystery, the shadow double to the Tree of Knowledge, or the same by another name.

The Spectre comes up again in the second half. Here he refers to it also as shadow as well as Spectre. This appears in the Seventh Night. Readers do well to bear in mind that earlier Blake expressed that the Spectre is awareness of an individual's own wrong doings and hence, it is the very creature that most needs the Christian forgiveness to which Blake repeatedly refers.

Soon thereafter Vala is described as becoming Urizen's and Los's harlot. This confounds the reader, since she was defined earlier as Urizen's mother. Scholars have observed that Blake has intentionally also caused Los and Urizen to change into one another, as well as existing as separate individuals.

The entire Zoas does not end until the Ninth, which Blake calls the Last Judgment. It concludes with the following two lines: "For intellectual War The war of swords departed now / the dark Religions are departed & sweet Science reigns," (p. 407).



Book 5, Book 5 : Chapter 1, Poetical Sketches

Book 5, Book 5 : Chapter 1, Poetical Sketches Summary

These constitute a major change in the writings of William Blake. They are not directly related to the copious writings involving God, Satan, Urizen, Beulah, the Furnaces and the clouds. There is more than one subgroup of the author's writings being brought together into this summary chapter—a set of 6 poems, then some writings designed for the stage.

The poems are entitled: To Spring, To Summer, To Autumn, To Winter, To the Evening Star, To Morning, Fair Elenor, then 5 in a row each of which bears the same title, Song, with one called Mad Song. After the Mad Song, there are two simply called Song. The first does not rhyme at the final word of the line of verse. Each stanza is of identical length, in this case, 4 lines. In the poem Summer each stanza is progressively one line longer than the one before it, as we find with healthy growth. The poem dedicated to Autumn has 6 line stanzas. The one for Winter has 4 line stanzas. Those poems dedicated to the same star, in evening and then in morning, are only one stanza long. The poem Fair Elenor functions as a segway into the ones entitled Song.

After those are a string of further poems that seem designed to be taken on their own. To the Muses is built of rhyming quatrains. It is followed by another story—this one is about a man called Gwin, King of Norway which is built of 29 equally sized stanzas. After this there is a poem self-defined as an imitation of Spenser. Here the ancient Apollo, cheerful healing fellow who served as an anthropomorphic vision of the actual Sun and associated powers, is called upon immediately. The stanza that follows conjures up another old pagan god, only this time it is Pan, a mixture of goat and man, a sublime music maker and charming dancer. The next stanza is headed up by the ancient deity Mercurius, the speech maker, and messenger of gods. Only in the final stanza are goddesses conjured, but more gently, not mentioned until the third line or so.

These two groups of poems are completed by one dedicated to a children's game.

Only after these are three charming pieces dedicated to the stage. They are reminiscent of Shakespeare's plays about Kings, and as Blake had read or seen those, this is likely to have been the inspiration for them. Much of these are done in dialogue, but with the same degree of excellence and brightness to be found in the rest of his writings.

Finally, after these are three short prose pieces. One of these goes into greater detail about the Couch of Death. The entire cluster is finalized with a section of prose that is incomplete. It is able to stand alone, but is acknowledged by the scholars as a fragment of a larger manuscript.



Book 5, Book 5 : Chapter 1, Poetical Sketches Analysis

These works remind readers that there is more to William Blake than Urizen and Los and the furnaces of Hell. The dramatic prologues remind readers of the writer's diverse powers and talents.

By this point in the massive text, it is clear readers can use the work as a great poetic resource. There are hours of entertainment possible from simply reading this book. While it is true that the tome has been put together to be able to serve as a textbook, probably at a university, it also makes it possible for fans to get their hands on the entire assortment of Blake's works. Admittedly, the most passionate fans will find a way to procure more of the man's visual artwork and not limit themselves to his writings.



Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 1, Island in the Moon

Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 1, Island in the Moon Summary

This set of writings is listed in the Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake under Roman numeral IV. These writings start as prose rather than poetic verse. The opening scene is of a small gathering where there is an intellectual conversation.

In this case, there are three philosophers taking part in a meeting. All are gentlemen. The social milieu is considered significant during these parts of Blake's writing. Blake has divided this prose into short chapters. By the 9th, the small group of men are moving intentionally towards going and getting drunk together.

Although that is true, the author then moves on to extol the virtues of married love. Amongst the many points made is the following, "...any loving woman is sure to be loved [regardless of her physical form]...so beneficial and highly valued is the love of woman," (p. 460).

The scholars have pointed out that some of these writings have been a little difficult to acquire. The author's notebooks were preserved by someone who saw that they were great intellectual property. By the time the present edition was published, various means including careful examination and infra-red technology have been used in order to assemble the works presented.

After this charming piece, there comes another set of poems. These ones are called Songs and Ballads. They are quite famous as they have been regularly used as exemplars of English literature for decades, in some cases for over a century, in academic institutions of learning.

There are numerous poems in this group that consist of rhyming quatrains. Readers may recognize some of these titles but find others unfamiliar depending upon the extent of their education regarding this. There are 62 poems under this category. Amongst them are those additionally defined as 'the Pickering Manuscript' which harbors the originals of such pieces as The Smile, the Golden Net and The Mental Traveller.

Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 1, Island in the Moon Analysis

This collection includes a few aspects that have come up before. One of these is Blake's concept of the Spectre—all of one's wrong doings, every act that needed to be forgiven in order for progress to be made, have mysteriously come together in one



condensed location in space so that they appear as an entity. Such a force as this is not further described but recurs as a being or quasi-being that, while one might hope that it was not connected with oneself, in truth very much is.

Further on, the author tells readers how to distinguish love from deceit. Deceit is lawful, cautious and refined. Deceit is aware of its interests only. Love, he claims, differs. Love is continuously blind to faults. Love tends towards cheerfulness.

Finally, the author refers readers to an ancient method of insight and prediction combined. This is augery, a means of checking all relevant factors, be they rational or not. Oracular divination was in some ways closely related with this.



Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 2, Satiric Verses

Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 2, Satiric Verses Summary

Here is yet another portion of the book where there is a change in the writings. Here again there are many individual poems. Many of these poems refer to a recurring theme. The poems range from quite short to very long. Three sections headed up by Roman Numerals are covered by this chapter summary. The general trend is that each summary and analysis section covers 50 pages of the text to which it refers.

There are also epitaphs as part of this section. One of them is, "I was buried near this Dike / that my friends may weep as much as they like," (p. 505).

After this, there is the area under Numeral VII entitled The Everlasting Gospel which contains just one poem. This one runs pages in length. There are individual stanzas that are 35 lines long or longer. The subject matter is clearly described in the title.

The author shares that by this time, he has established enough of a reputation to satisfy himself. He would like more money and fame but he feels that his value as both artist and printer have been acknowledged. One of Blake's means of doing this was to hold exhibitions for his artwork. The writer and printer created his own exhibition catalog. The contents of this have been added to the Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake.

During the catalog the author explains that he is a painter of water colors. William Blake promoted his paintings with well written descriptions of items readers may well never see. Those who find their interest increases as a direct result of this will be pleased to learn that there is yet another aspect of the artist they can explore.

Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 2, Satiric Verses Analysis

The editors and scholars take readers to a new level of knowledge and awareness about the artist Blake in this section of the book. For the first time there is some useful nonfiction information added. This comes later in the section, as the catalog that prepares the public for one of his art exhibits.

The writings in this section also show the diverse writing abilities of the author. Here, the epitaphs show what he can do when he does not have the full range of stanzas available to him. It can be quite rewarding to discover what one can do with one or two short sentences.

Blake also pursues the matter of politics in this chapter. This pertains to those who patronize the arts. He goes out of his way to refer to a public issue. During his life, the English nobility chose to nurture the arts. This decision included extending their

patronage beyond national boundaries. The nobles chose to support the efforts of the Continental Europeans rather than those of the nations of the Americas.

By this time in the book the author has expressed himself clearly enough and often enough that readers have had ample opportunity to develop a correct sense of his style.



Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 3, The Design of the Last Judgment

Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 3, The Design of the Last Judgment Summary

Here the author begins by providing a description to a client of Blake's visual art.

With respect to William Blake's painting, there were at least two kinds. On the one hand, he earned a good portion of his living by painting signs or decorating interiors or other commissioned pieces. On the other hand, he also made paintings that he hoped to sell as art, even though he had created them in accordance with his own wishes and those of Genius rather than as a direct consequence of being commissioned.

Much of the rest of this chapter is dedicated to his visual arts. This often includes a greater discussion of his beliefs. One example of this occurs when he restates his experience that the Eternal and the realms of the Imagination are the true reality. This statement takes us back to the very beginning of the entire compilation. At this starting point, Blake presents two arguments. The first claims that the sensory world is the real one, the latter that the divine realm and the mind are united in and by the imagination. The rest of these poetic stories and the like stem from this idea.

The evil ones in the poetic stories have been those who are against the idea that the mind has greater power than what comes to be presented to the human senses as objects of the world. Part of what makes Blake's writings so meaningful their ability to stimulate and their power to bring these deep metaphysical questions and debates to the fore of peoples' minds.

Blake takes this discussion to another level. He expresses that he thinks that those who get to Heaven do not arrive there because of having curbed their own passions. Retraining themselves in many ways is not what the writer and printer thinks makes for spiritual success. He thinks this occurs when people cultivate their Understandings. Attendant to this, Blake may mean to imply, is that they grow ever more forgiving by developing their Understanding.

William Blake does explicitly claim that he believes in the last judgment of the Christian religion. He does not pretend to understand the resurrection except that this is rooted in the direct connection between the spiritual nature of the mind and how it is the reality upon which what has seemed to be flesh is based rather than the other way around. The truth of the primacy of the mind, of the spirit over the flesh, is shown by the resurrection.

The next batch of writings by the same author are listed under the title of XI Public Address.



Book 6, Book 6 : Chapter 3, The Design of the Last Judgment Analysis

Unlike in the case of the earlier sections, this time the analysis is mainly a continuance of the above summary. The author has been clarifying more of his views. "As the interest of man, so his God—as his God, so he," (p. 584). This is a new form of a point that the writer-printer has been making the whole time. William Blake is not saying that the divine is but the invention of man. What he means is that God conforms, at least partially, to the viewer's perception of Him. Blake will find God more readily in art than will a brick layer who dislikes art. The latter, however, will be amongst the first to notice the ways in which God is like a brick layer whereas Blake probably will not even notice.

William Blake decries the commercialization of art. He claims that commercialization is destructive to the arts in general and this is why he opposes it. A little further along the Englishman explains that when he tells the truth, it is normally for the purpose of defending those who do know it. This, he tells readers, is different from attempting to convince those who do not know it. Finally, when it comes to art, William Blake also feels it important to make another distinction: there is creative invention and there is imitation. Imitation breeds skill, but Blake declares boldly that true Genius is when a man or woman does, invents or creates something that no one else could do.

These are followed by a segment called Annotations. These all show the artist in reference to his social atmosphere and in relation to a given body of knowledge. Here, scholars have taken excerpts from his notebooks that come from a number of other books. Blake devised this system for learning about himself and for relating to some of these authors. As a result, there are short notes made in direct association with a comment written by another.

Mr. Blake's remarks make intriguing reading. Everyone has views about the relationship of subjectivity-objectivity-morality. The author makes his view plain when he writes, "Conscience in those that have it is unequivocal, it is the voice of God. Our judgment of right and wrong is Reason. I believe that the Bishop laugh at The Bible in his sleeve and so did Locke," (p. 613).



Book 7, Book 7 : Chapter 1, Inscriptions

Book 7, Book 7 : Chapter 1, Inscriptions Summary

This begins as a continuation of the preceding summary chapter. Readers will recall earlier that there was one set of etchings included along with inscriptions. In this particular case, the set constituted a written poem. Upon first glance at least, there does not seem to be the depth of rhyme or reason for the specific sequence of pictures or phrases that turn out to be lines to a coherent poem.

Here then is a list of the inscriptions: Joseph of Arimathea among The Rocks of Albion, Albion rose from where he labourd at the Mill with Slaves, Our End is Come, [List of Subjects for the history of England], Exodus [from] Egypt, [Inscriptions on separate illuminated plates], [On Sketches for Emblems], [List of Apostles], [Lettering on Sketches for Title Pages], [Miscellaneous Inscriptions on Designs], [Inscriptions on Tombstones], [List of Designs for Poems by Mr. Gray], Chaining of Orc, [Descriptions of Illustrations to Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penseroso], [Engraving of Mirth and Her Companions], [Note on a Pencil Drawing of Nine Grotesque Heads], [Notes in the Blake-Varley Sketchbook], Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims, [Inscriptions of Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job], [Blake's signature on the drawing for job design XIV], Genesis [Chapter Title's in Blake's Illustrated Manuscript], [On Blake's Illustrations to Dante], [On Blake's Epitome of Hervey's Meditations among the Tombs].

Of the writings, these are the least coherent. Further, these do not all fall into the same pattern wherein a group of them adds up to make a poem. Some of them do add up to make poems, such as those under "Elegy" on page 681. Unlike the others, "Chaining of Orc" exhibits entire poetic stanzas designed to accompany visual art.

Book 7, Book 7 : Chapter 1, Inscriptions Analysis

The inscriptions have been included so that passionate fans of William Blake's can learn more about him through his artwork. As noted above there are those which are poems designed to accompany his water colors.

Many of the other inscriptions are captions intended to join an etching as part of an illustrated or illustrative work. There is not much to write about these. Those intently interested in the details of this part of his work will be grateful that they have been included.



Book 7, Book 7 : Chapter 2, Misc. & Letters

Book 7, Book 7 : Chapter 2, Misc. & Letters Summary

Of the final two sections, one is referred to as Miscellaneous writings and the very last contains private letters written and sent by William Blake during his life. The most prominent piece of the Miscellaneous works is unquestionably the letter in which Mr. Blake's new invention is introduced to the public. At long last, when this letter is read, the mystery of those Illuminated Plates is revealed, or, as it were, fully explained.

The private letters come last. These provide an alternative narrative voice of their author. The reason for the communication is most often work and money. William Blake is most often writing to his best funding source, a Mr. H., Esquire who lives in the county of Sussex in the Southern part of England. He is normally updating his colleague on the status of a project.

In his letters, William Blake's demeanor is middle class and polite. He is not totally impersonal but seems to wish to share something of himself while being cautious to avoid telling too much.

There are a few letters in which Blake shares a great deal more. Whenever he does, readers either discover more about his home life with his wife or else they find out just how sincere his artwork is. A few of his most precious beliefs are expressed as clearly in his personal letters as they are during his creative writings.

Thanks to the letters, readers can embrace a fuller understanding of this beloved English poet, painter and inventor. The letters make an excellent addition to his poetry and other prose. The simple and personal nature of them is charming and gives readers a direct view of the man that would not be so readily accessible otherwise.

Book 7, Book 7 : Chapter 2, Misc. & Letters Analysis

These final selections from the author's writings are fantastic. Readers can see for themselves that these pieces round out the works to a kind of completion not otherwise possible. Both give readers greater insight into the author. This is especially true of the letters which show him from his own perspective.

Most of the letters are written in the manner of a professional and are about his work. Still, this shows readers quickly and easily a great deal about the standards of business correspondence during the late 1700s and early 1800s in England. As the artist has been so vividly creative much of the time, it comes as a pleasure to readers to have this straight and factual prose by William Blake. The letters give an ideal counterpoint to illuminated printed hexameter.



Characters

Urizen appears in The Book of Urizen & Elsewhere

This is a fictional character. He is an extremely powerful evil entity who has more than one creative piece devoted to him by William Blake. His role is somewhat variable. He is referred to as a devil, as a denizen of the deep. He is also called an Orc in later parts of the book. The entity is spiritual in nature, but evil. He functions as a leader. He is associated with rage, and darkness and fire. William Blake also uses him to indicate the direction of North.

This character occurs in many locations throughout the book. He is associated with Los, who is also fictional. He, like Los, is also both intimately connected with real places and events.

Little Boy appears in Songs of Innocence, and elsewhere

This is simply a child. He occurs as the subject of 4 poems. There are actually 6 poems that have a little boy as their subject, one of the poems is dedicated to a little black boy, the rest do not indicate the child's race.

This boy, like many others, is functioning as the universal. As a particular individual child, he is fictional, but resembles and intimates many actual boys.

Rintrah appears in Milton, the First Book

The author explicitly states during this text that Rintrah is a reprobate. This is one of his three classes of men. This is one of the two kinds which are destined to permanent destruction rather than resurrection.

There is a Great Assembly during this book that includes Rintrah. This character occurs in a few of the other pieces as well.

Palamabron appears in Milton and others

Palamabron is another of the major fiction characters within the complete body of William Blake's writings.

This character is supplanted by Satan. The devil repeatedly endeavors to take over Palamabron's duties. This is granted to Satan, but there are some strange consequences, one of which is that the horses and the servants react very differently to Satan than they did to Palamabron.



This leads to a trial. Palamabron is blamed, and after only 1000 years he relents in his post and allows himself to be replaced.

Satan appears in Throughout but not Everywhere

Satan is called by Blake in the Milton writings as being of the Elect class, which is one of the three classes of mankind: the elect, the reprobate and the redeemed.

The author cries out Satan's name or has his narrative voice do so repeatedly. In addition to a mild mannered exterior, Satan is also described as having a deep rage. He is a powerful spiritual entity and tormentor. He is some times set against Christ, at other times he is a part of the story of Urizen and Los.

God appears in Multiple Locations

God is referred to many times in these writings. He is referred to both in general, and in the form of Jesus the Christ. He is recognized as the most powerful entity in the universe and the ultimate source and controller of everything.

God can also be perceived, according to Blake, in people as the Poetic Genius. In this case, he is seen to be behind everything, especially everything good.

God manifests in mankind in forms that humans can recognize and understand. Blake is clear about certain characteristics about God, but in some attributes is not so definite. Jesus the Christ is an undisputed form of God.

The Truth, and the Imagination and the Poetic Genius and the Spirit are all, like Jesus the Christ, ways in which God can be perceived. God is also the Infinite that can be perceived in the finite by the mind of man when that mind is properly used.

Angels, as God's loyal non-human servants are also referred to within the creative works of this author.

Thel appears in Book of Thel

This character has an entire book devoted to her. She is a youngest daughter, who seeks serenity. During much of the poem she is alone with nature. She is described as pale, and delicate.

King of England appears in Prophecy for America

This figure is mentioned only briefly. He appears in the Prophecy for America. "The King of England looking Westward trembles at the vision," (p. 53).



Long John Brown appears in Songs & Ballads

This is a man who is tormented by the Devil because of love for another. He appears in a poem entitled Long John Brown & Little Mary Bell within the Songs & Ballads section.

Little is said of him, other than that he was overthrown by the devil over a love difficulty. The only, or main visible symptom was that he had an extremely fast metabolism and a voracious appetite. So he ate and drank to excess but withered away nonetheless. His problem was not caused by himself nor by Mary but by the manipulations of a fairy and the devil's own opportunism.

Mary Bell appears in Songs & Ballads

This is a human girl. She occurs in the same poem as Long John Brown. She is entirely innocent. Long John Brown falls in love with her.

Fairy appears in Songs & Ballads and elsewhere

There are actually a number of fairies in the Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake. They occur as references with some confusion. Are they figments of the imagination, the very imagination that Blake as argued is the truth? Are they real? The trouble is much the same as it is with old gods or with Blake's own fictive characters.

Little Mary Bell has a fairy.

William Bond appears in Songs & Ballads

This is a man whose romantic desires are closely associated with faeries. There is a direct conflict in his case between angels of providence and his faeries. It is as though his various attractions to females are the very stuff that creates or attracts the faery folk. Angels drive away his fairies.

He chooses one woman to be his wife, but there is another disappointed woman.

Mary of the William Bond poem appears in Songs & Ballads

Mary is a human woman. She could be interpreted as being Mary Bell at a more mature stage of life. She is hoping to be able to marry William Bond. As it happens in the poem named after him, this does not occur, largely because of how he loves another woman.



Objects/Places

Albion appears in The Book of Urizen and More

This is the ancient name for Britain. The author refers to his homeland using this name repeatedly during the work. He frequently refers to this in relation to poems or comments about the Druids, including the Bard.

Blake also refers to Albion when he gives the prophecies. In this sense it is important to realize that Albion is not a purely imaginary location. This location appears in both fictionalized and actual forms during The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake.

Jerusalem appears in Jerusalem & elsewhere

This city has an entire work devoted to it. The author is mainly referring to the actual geographical location.

Jerusalem, the book, has four chapters. It is in exquisite poetic verse and has been produced on printing materials.

London, England appears in Various

This is the capital city of the nation of England. The city was settled by the Romans and has flourished almost constantly ever since.

The author refers to the city both as an almost mythical place but also as a location to which he has been. There are many sites within the city with which he has some familiarity and mentions during the body of his written works.

Lambeth appears in Letters

This is an English town that the author lived in with his wife during the early 1800s. This was a reasonably happy time and place for the two of them. The author's work was going well and this allowed his reputation to improve. He noted that the way he was treated by others seemed to benefit directly from increases in his income and reputation.

Sussex appears in Letters

This is a county in England. It is referred to exclusively in connection with a major funder of Blake. William Hayley, Esquire resides in Sussex during the first two decades



of the 1800s. His address here is noted in numerous letters included in the Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake.

The Moon appears in For the Sexes and elsewhere

This well known object is mentioned now and then amongst the poetry and prose. However, unlike nearly all else, there is a photograph of an etching during For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise. This occurs prior to the rest of the inscriptions.

red globe / orb of fire appears in numerous

There are many writings involving the characters of Urizen and Los. Amongst the complex stories of these figures and Satan and Angels in the land of Albion and of the mind, there is the recurring object of the red globe.

This item is associated with life, but also with rage and torment. It is as if it is a seed of or from Hell that has to do with the type of life that comes from corruption rather than incorruption. It is present in most of the books and poems that include Urizen and Los.

Elohim appears in the Ghost of Abel

These are very high ranking Angels. Early on in the work, William Blake states that they are responsible for the creation of the world. Later, however, in a work that is an invented dialogue between such profound figures as Jehovah, Satan and Abel, these powerful Angels are mentioned more than once.

Furnaces appears in Multiple locations

These are a part of Hell, and visions of it. The author alludes occasionally to their role in metal working but he normally will only acknowledge the smithing rather than the finding, mining, smelting and refining processes. Smelting of course, requires great and terrible furnaces.

Fury, rage and all the torments of Hell in Blake's work rely upon images of fire as a hostile, destructive force. Jerusalem, and the books of Milton are some of the places within the greater work where these references appear.

Eden appears in Jerusalem

This is the garden named in the Jewish scriptures as the first home of humanity, a place of utter innocence and state of perfection before the eyes of God.



This is the place that the inhabitants were evicted from as a direct consequence of having been seduced into obtaining knowledge of morality and ethics by a deceiving serpent.

Lion appears in Jerusalem & elsewhere

This animal occurs as a symbol of great strength and grandeur.

Ox appears in A Memorable Fancy Plate 24

This is an animal. It is mentioned as a symbol and a means of contrasting the truths of itself and those of the lion. The two are used together to show that attempts to govern the two by applying the same rules will result in the oppression of one or the others. This is an effort to show that fairness and equality some times means different rather than identical rules.

The power of the ox is great strength and patience. This is true whether or not it has been subjected to the yoke of man and used to empower humanity's farming efforts.

Illuminated Plates appears in Earliest writings and letters

These are objects upon which the author wrote many poems. It is simply that he wrote directly into these rather than writing onto paper and then having some other printer re-work them to be printed.

The first section of The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake was originally drafted in this format. The reason for this is explained at the end of the book, in the section entitled Letters. The author was a printer and believed in experimentation. As he considered self-publication for his works, he accepted that he was enabled to do this by virtue of being a professional printer with printing equipment.

Priest appears in Visions of the Daughters of Albion

These are not objects in the usual sense. They do not figure centrally in most of the works, but during the Visions of the Daughters of Albion they are referred to. They are clerics of the Christian religion.

Abys appears in Milton Books and other

The author refers to this repeatedly. He means it mainly as a spiritual location or situation. It is best understood as a place of either darkness or of chaos. If coherent ideas are rent asunder, the thinker may seem to have entered an abyss.



Void appears in Illuminated works and other

This is also a spiritual location. Unlike the abyss, the author refers to one instance of this as occurring in what humans normally perceive as physical space.

Concupiscence appears in Letters

This is not an object in the standard materialistic sense. This is a condition. Concupiscence is the residual traces and character features of an individual. It includes behavioral and other tendencies both good and bad. Whether advantageous or problematic, concupiscence often comes up as a Christian term. Blake refers to it in this respect during his letters and when he discusses the importance of forgiveness in Christian practice.

Concupiscence includes those tendencies that lend themselves within a person to particular types of sins. When a person is cleansed and forgiven, no punishment or negative traces remain from the sins themselves, but the concupiscence remains.

Themes

The Divine (God)

William Blake introduces a number of major spiritual and philosophical ideas to readers through his writings. It is quite clear that this is a vital component to his life throughout his works.

One of the central features of William Blake's thought is that Poetic Genius and Divine Spirit are one and the same. He makes this clear in many locations throughout the work. This shows that he believes that there is a direct correlation of mind with spirit.

William Blake claims that it is due to the nature of human perceptual limitation that God is man. He tells readers that just as not every creative genius is the same, but has the same Poetic Genius controlling him or her, that the Divine is another name for the ultimate form of this same energy and that it manifests in various human forms. Each form will have a unique expression for this. When Blake expressed this, he did so as his own idea. At the same time, this idea had already appeared in the world.

Blake's writings show that he felt he was frequently confronted with both Angelic and Satanic forces. This may have been due to the judgments of others or a fact or a consequence of his own thinking, explorations and culture. He followed upon the international success of Dante's *Inferno* and may have known of the work.

Many writers have not written so expressively of both angels and demons as William Blake has. He displays strong awareness of Christ and of principles of religion. Forgiveness and Understanding are the two primary functions of Christian thought and behavior that he advocates. These are the powers with which to address Sin, he claims.

There are a few ideas that are most intimately related to spiritual darkness. There is the Void, which he mentions only a few times, but the first is early on in the work. More often he refers to the Abyss. In other cases he describes fiery places, which are often dark. These are, in general and specifically associated with Death rather than with Eternal Life. The latter Jesus promised, was accessible to all those who received him, followed him completely and truly. The former was the definite end for the rest.

The reason William gives for the Resurrection is its connection with the true nature of the spiritual. The uncorrupted spiritual body is not the separation or division of flesh & spirit in the way that the French philosopher Descartes and many others have taught. Aristotle was correct, according to William Blake, to view the spirit of man as united, part & parcel of the body of man.

Blake tells readers that the Eternal Truth and the Imagination are the same and that those who believe that the generative and vegetative world, as he calls it, are real have fallen into error.



Creative Vision

The writer & printer William Blake thrills and frightens many readers by joining thoughts and ideas dedicated to perceptions of truth with unbridled creativity. He does this when he openly discusses and uses the power of prophecy during the writings published in his Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake.

People fear false prophets and they are rooted in deceit or drawn in by the fear and misinterpretation of the people. True prophecy, the Bible advises, is to be shared. When William Blake shares his prophecies in this work, and he has written prophecies that pertain to America, and Europe and something for Africa he has complied with this Biblical injunction. These he has provided in prose and has labeled them as his prophecies.

This is fortunate, due to the intense, creative nature of the poems that involve Urizen and Los. Here, the author creates a compendium of fact, history, ancient myth-newly discovered, and raw fiction.

Many parts of the author's visions of Urizen and Los, and of the fiery deeps cause a handful of specific thoughts to emerge. One, is the secret of metal working. There is a very real Earthly connection with the union of the human mind's creativity and raw materials found in the Earth to have found and formed metals. This technology is often referred to in myths, with respect to the smithing, and the author mentions the use of copper in relation to the printing press. However, metal mining, refining and working is one of the most powerful technological advancements, especially in the field of war. However, to make it work at all requires a tremendous amount of fire and force. The sweaty fires that approach the Abyss, or that Blake refers to as one of the Hells, seems suspicious in its descriptions as depicting either the interior of the Earth as current science tells mankind that it is, or else that he means the men and situations where metals are mined, then smelted and refined prior to their even being able to be used by the smiths. There is something dark, fearsome, strange and powerful about these forces that are at work.

Here, William Blake has provided readers with the unity of creative imagination, that is not bounded or restricted in any way to what he himself calls the Ratio of physical truths, and Truth as he sees it.

Boy and Girl

There is in William Blake's works a set of a boy and a girl. These occur in the writings as more than one poem. The first two poems that are set in relation to one another are about a little boy.

The title of the first is: The Little Boy Lost. It is very early on in the poetry of the author. It is followed by a poem about this same person; it is called The Little Boy Found. At first



this is a surprise. Then, about ten pages later on, there are two poems devoted to The Little Girl Lost, and The Little Girl Found.

Then, ten pages later yet again, there is another set of poems that provide a new variant of the repetition of this theme. A Little Boy Lost immediately precedes A Little Girl Lost.

Style

Point of View

The point of view for the written works is predominantly third person. The majority of the poetry is written from the synthetic objective perspective. This includes all of the Songs of Innocence and those of Experience.

There are writings within the Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake that do not have this perspective. All of the author's Memorable Fancies, for example, are written from the first person point of view. Here, readers can presume that the author is writing as himself. The Memorable Fancies are not dedicated to fiction. While the artist has not agreed to limit himself from using any creative powers in expressing his ideas, these prose sections of the writings are truthful on the whole.

The perspective of the many writings that include the story of Los, and Urizen, and Britain when she was known in the world as Albion, is a bit different. Here, the author is neither writing from the nonfictional vantage point of simply being himself nor from an entirely orchestrated third person narrative. The feelings and views of the author Blake, are expressed through the medium, but the attitude is quasi-objective. Here, rather than the cool writings of the scientist, readers have the quality more of a narrator, or a story teller or other bard, which forms the special view point of the bard.

Poetic verse typically has both an autobiographical and narrative quality to it. This shows markedly in William Blake's poetry as found within the compendium.

There are additional forms of writing included. The inscriptions section has no viewpoint per se. The author's input can be described as invisible.

In contrast, the writers' personal letters clearly indicate his own perspective. Here, there continues to be an artistic flair, but the point of view is that of first person, and actual. In this respect, letter writing is closer to journalism than is poetry. From these, readers can glean a sense for the author who otherwise remains a mystery. The notes that join the annotations are nothing like the letters in that they do not deal with facts and they are not directed towards any reader other than himself. They are entirely truthful, and they represent the utterly subjective contents of the writer's mind within the moment that they were written.

Setting

The settings of the works vary. The writings are not all of the same type nor do they all occur in exactly the same location or type of environment. The author uses both the countryside and cities and towns for locations.



The Little Boy Lost and The Little Girl in the early poems of the book occur in the countryside or else in some natural corner of the person's life. The reason for the confusion is simply that the size of young children enable them to experience a whole world of gardens and magic without ever leaving the space between the house and the sidewalk of a town, let alone what happens when they have more free run in some safe countryside.

The location of those numerous poems and prose works involving the denizens of the deep, the hirelings of Hell as well as many Angels is multiple. As literary devices the author uses material plane locations but he has also invented places and refers to still other locations that do not exist in the usual sense but in the imagination and possibly in the spiritual realm. One of these is the Abyss. Blake writes of the Void in at least one instance where it is clearly located beyond the planet Earth but well within the spatial regions known to us as this solar system. The fiery places where rage and strife and heat intermingle with darkness and the fierce struggles of Los and Urizen, have a location or position but not after the same manner. It seems to be somewhere on planet Earth certainly. In some sense, this place is even part of England or Britain. However, this could be just some spiritual location that has somehow overflowed through the imagination into factual awareness while remaining hidden and obviously it is often times in some manner of depths, but not under the sea.

A great deal of the writings take place in England. He writes many of the letters from a place called Lambeth. He often writes to a very important figure who is located in the county of Sussex. There are also direct references to London and points within the vast reaches of London, which is also in the nation's Southeastern quadrant.

Those poems and writings that do not take place in the England as described above have been devised to occur in the same place but under the ancient name of the island, Albion. Albion was the name of the country prior to Roman incursions. The name also indicates the height of the old religion. Druidry was the dominant religion of Britain for quite a long time. While William Blake does not espouse any clear doctrines about druidry in any detail he does refer to it frequently. He contrasts it with Christianity; the two continue to co-mingle. Blake writes the vast majority of his poetic works from England, and writes frequently of her as Albion, Land of the Druids.

Language and Meaning

The language is colorful. This is to be expected, particularly in the cases of the poetry. William Blake is in fact an artist and a word smith.

His writing style is automatically and intentionally designed to go well with his paintings. The author has ensured that readers are able to feel a number of strong feelings when they connect with his choice of words.

The structure of each piece of poetry is of course influenced by the demands of the form.



Proper meter and sound as well as descriptive quality are all necessary in the selection of each and every word of a poem. Thanks to this, and a brilliant flare for the dramatic, we have lines such as, "Of Eternals, the visions remote / Of the dark separation appear'd. / As glasses discover Worlds [obvious reference to telescopes] / In the endless Abyss of space, / So the expanding eyes of Immortals / Beheld the dark visions of Los, / And the globe of life blood trembling," (p. 78).

Throughout the poetry and the prose there are small variances in spelling. This is due to the alterations in the language of English. When William Blake wrote, the practice of standardizing spelling had grown but not to the great extent that it did within the 100 years after his death.

Structure

The edition used to produce this study guide is the Anchor Books Newly Revised Edition.

There are several sections to the book. The material is divided by the way it was produced or its nature. The topics of the contents were a secondary consideration when the book was assembled. The sections are each headed by bold Roman numerals. Covering the entire body of the contents are XV (15) of these sections.

The first structure that the author used was illuminated prints. This seems novel or unusual to readers. There are letters at the end of the book that provide the reason. The author was a printer. He invented a new means for improving the quality and sophistication of printing that was also dramatically cost effective. This permitted him to make money while a young man and meant that, like the famous Albrecht Drurer, he was ready to illustrate using etchings. All of these facts conspired so that rather than writing and drawing and then seeking a printer as an author would, William Blake created directly onto wax and copper as only a printer-author-illustrator could do so well.

There are also etchings and drawings. Most of these are absent from the Complete Works, but their inscriptions have been included in sections. There is one section where a series of William Blake's inscribed drawings have been included into the large book. Blake explains during the course of the materials presented that etching and drawing, to his mind, really are the same thing.

A great deal of the author's creative works are not shown as they are not his written pieces. A number of his letters have been included in their own section, and these explain a great deal about the author's life.

There are sections which are purely poetry, and others that are entirely prose. There are also those that switch amongst the two.

In addition to these factors, the work contains repeating themes within the creative stories that are produced. Inspection of the author's life also exposes recurrent patterns. These are addressed more completely during the themes section. It is important to

accept that the poems and prose sections pertaining to certain themes—such a recurrent pattern of innocence and experience, and to the Abyss and devils versus Angels and Jesus—have come together within the model edition to provide another level of order to the over all structure.

The 15 sections are named as follows, as found in the table of contents: I. The Works in Illuminated Printing, II. The Prophetic Works, III. Poetical Sketches, IV. An Island in the Moon, V. Songs and Ballads, VI. Satiric Verses and Epigrams, VII. The Everlasting Gospel, VIII. Blake's Exhibition and Catalogue of 1809, IX. Descriptions of the Last Judgment, X. Blake's Chaucer: Prospectuses, XI. Public Address, XII. The Marginalia, XIII. Inscriptions and Notes on or for Pictures, XIV. Miscellaneous Prose, XV. The Letters



Quotes

"As the true method of knowledge is experiment the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences," (p. 1).

"All Poetic Genius is the same in equal extent that people are alike," (p. 5).

"Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul," (p. 7).

"And be like him and he will then love me," (p. 9).

"Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell there God is dwelling to," (p. 13).

"They called her Pity, and fled," (p. 78).

"But no light from the fires. all was darkness / In the flames of Eternal fury," (p. 73).

"Bound in the fierce raging immortal," (p. 91).

"to Justify the Way of God to Man," (p. 95).

"That he who will not defend the Truth, may be compelled to defend a Lie, that he may be snared and caught and taken," (p. 102).

"For Satan, flaming with Rintrah's fury hidden beneath his own mildness," (p. 103).

"Half friendship is the bitterest Enmity said Los," (p. 144).

"Negations Exist Not but Contraries do Mutually Exist," (p. 162).

"In the Oak Groves of Albion which overspread all the Earth," (p. 224).

"The dead brood over Europe, the cloud and vision descends over / chearful France," (p. 286).

"Incessant tears are now my food. Incessant rage and tears," (p. 331).

"The Angel answered, 'My name is wonderful; enquire not after it, seeing it is a secret: but, if thou wilt, offer an offering unto the Lord,'" (p. 445).

"My title as a Genius thus is proved / Not praised by Hayley nor by Flaxman lov'd," (p. 505).

"When a Man has Married a Wife / he finds out whether / Her knees and elbows are only / glued together," (p. 516).

"...The Spectre may suppose them Clergymen in the Pulpit, scourging Sin instead of Forgiving it," (p. 557).



Topics for Discussion

What is your favorite type of William Blake's written works, based upon the categorical divisions used in the book? Give at least one reason why.

Do you think William Blake is such a great artist? Why or why not.

Agree or disagree with Blake's belief that the Spiritual realm and the Imagination are of the same realm and that both are in truth more powerful than the physical realm, especially for those who cease to be 'enslaved' to the material and sensory forms of experience. Defend your answer. If you really don't know or feel unsure, describe why.

Is it a big deal that William Blake had read the works of many dead philosophers from the ancient world as well as more recent 'famous thinkers'?

Do you think Blake was a 'good guy', a 'bad guy' or a mixture of these? Defend your answer.

Do you have any idea what the fiery places, and the Abyss and the Void are that Blake refers to repeatedly throughout the work, especially during the mythology of Urizen and Los? Explain your answer.

What is your perception of William Blake's views about women based upon the text?

Support your answer.

Do you feel the letters were all based upon business relationships? If so, do you have an ethical feeling about this or not?

Give an opinion about Blake based upon your knowledge that he was: an inventor, a creative poet & writer, an illustrator, a painter, and also a lover-husband and friend.

Describe Blake's view of Poetic Genius.

Agree or disagree with Blake's assertion that God and the Poetic Genius are the same, and that it is this 'force' which manifests throughout humanity.

If you have heard of and learned about or read the philosophy of Hegel, show how Blake's beliefs about divine genius and Hegel's spiritual-mind are connected, other than through the history of philosophy in Western man.

Discuss the role of Druidry in William Blake's poetry and prose.

Why did Blake bother to call England Albion so much in his written works? Is this like people who still thought of his wife by her maiden name more so than by her married name- or is that not the same at all?

Did you come away from this feeling that William Blake was a Christian? Explain your answer.