

**John Cowper Powys  
and  
William Blake**

**Prof. Michael Grenfell  
University of Southampton, UK**

**2022**

# Structure of Talk

- Personal Intro.
- JCP on Blake
- Creative Vision
- Nature/ Gnostic Myth
- JCP/ Blake: Universe/Material World/ Spirit
- 'Sex' and Union
- Self: Images/Mind/ Soul/ Ego Memory
- Resolution?
- Psychology of Creativity?
- JCP/ Blake – Differences/ Similarities

# At the foot of Tyburn Tree

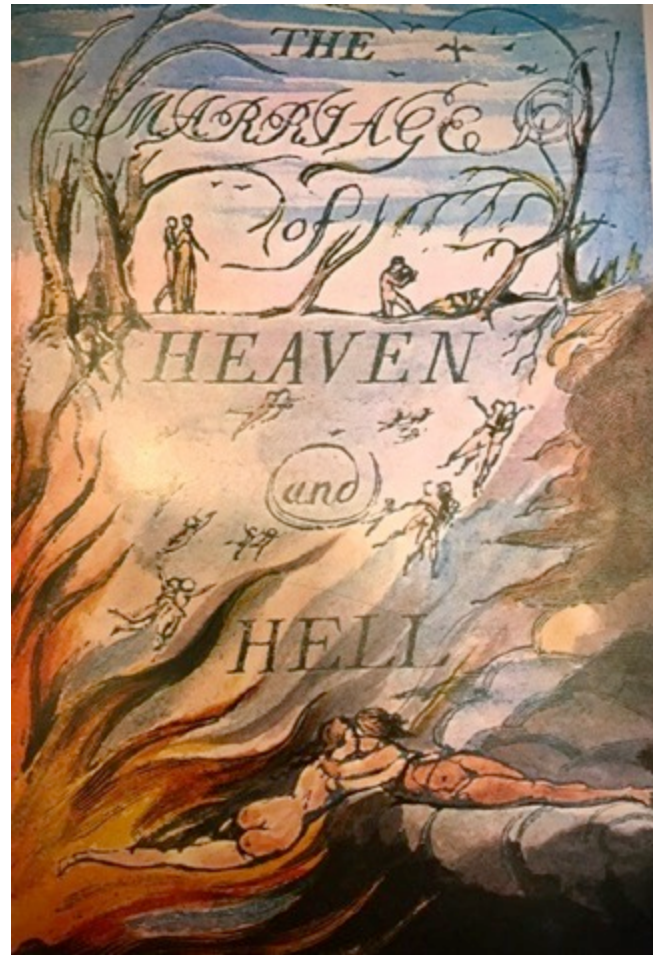
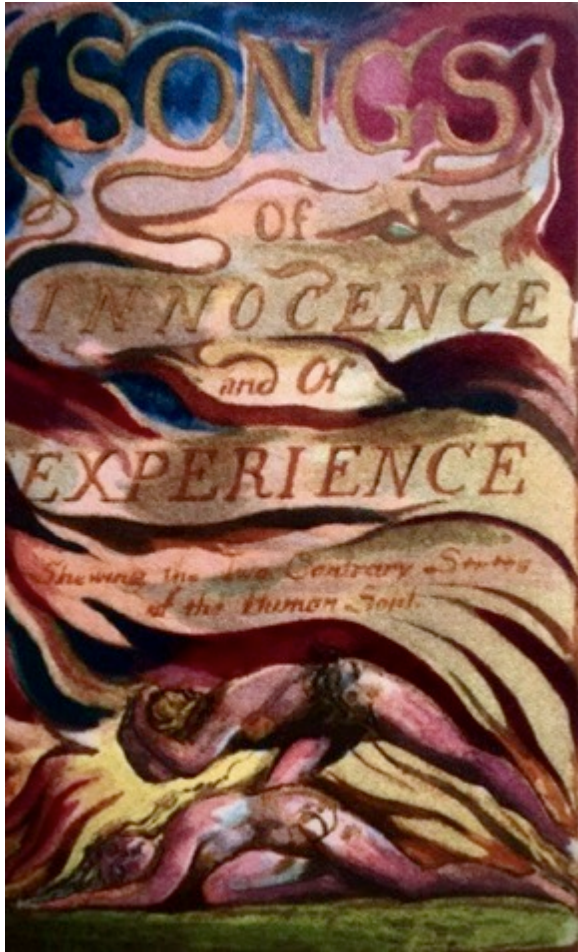


# William Blake

John Cowper Powys



Village Press



# JCP on Blake - 1923

- Anticipates Nietzsche: Since artists 'brood' on Blake
- He quotes Nietzsche on the child who will come at last to inaugurate the beginning of the 'Great Noon'
- Against 'cult of children' which suppresses them – protestant/puritanical.
- For 'renaissance of Catholic faith and Pagan Freedom'
- Blake's child is to be found in every man and woman: innocence.

- Christ as ‘possessed of a power drawn from the depths of the universe’: ‘a man-child’ who is to redeem the race – with a temper the very opposite of the ascetic one’.
- Christ as Pagan Eros – opposition to restraint.
- ‘disentangle the phenomena of sexual love from any notion or idea of shame’.
- ‘children of passion and pleasure sport and play’. :  
‘emancipated flesh’ and ‘free spirit’. ‘THE TRIUMPHANT  
NUPTIALS OF SOUL AND BODY’

- 'Happiness – not optimistic – eating/ drinking/ philandering' but: 'He who binds to himself a joy, Does the winged life destroy, He who kisses it as it flies, Lives in Eternity's sunrise'. 'Energy without disturbance'.
- Tears – Anger
- Intellectual and Moral Freedom.
- Innocence/ Experience – like 'little children'
- 'one is never oppressed by the weight of natural beauty – a single tree, a single petal transport us to 'fields' of light ' – the mystic dance of creation'
- 'For this is the prerogative of imagination – that it can reconcile us to life where life is simplest and least adorned.'



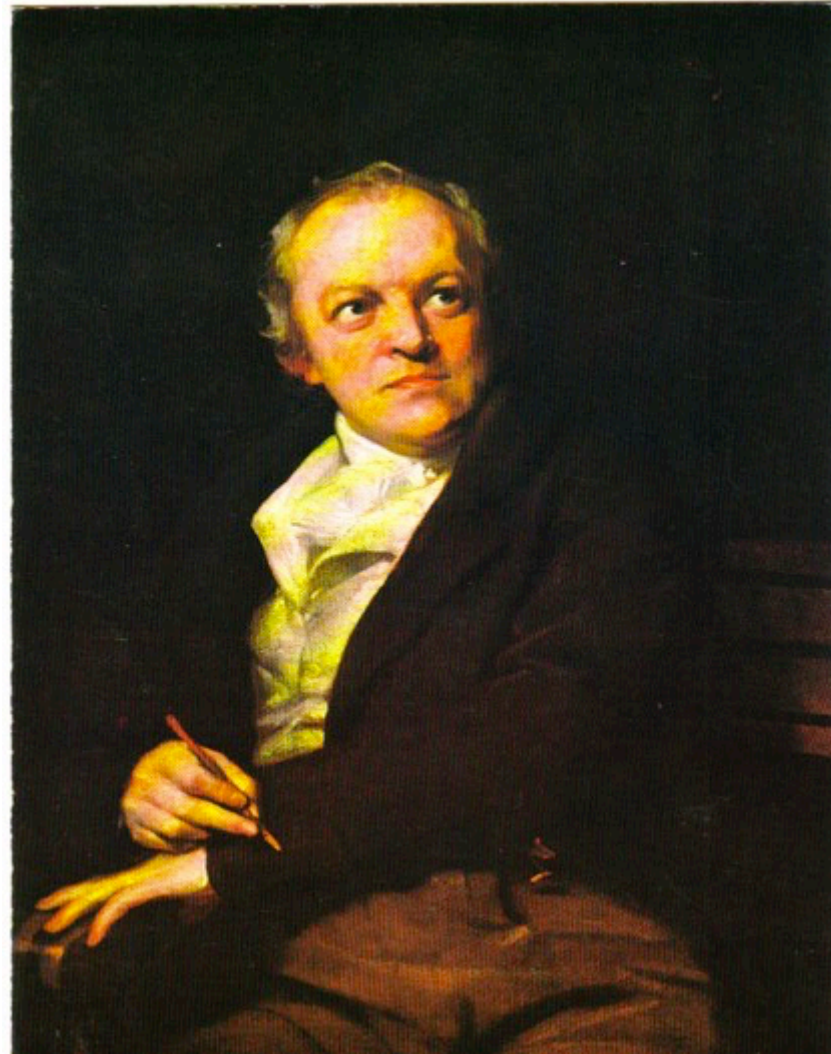
# Tensions

- Society
- Spirit
- Object
- Solitude
- Nature
- Reaction
- Reason
- Discipline
- Spontaneity
- Happiness
- Individual
- Matter
- Subject
- Company
- Culture
- Quietude
- Imagination
- Chaos
- Premeditated
- Desperation

- Heaven
- Life
- Form
- Inside
- Now
- Innocence
- Human
- Man
- Sensuality
- Invasion

- Hell
- Death
- Unformed
- Outside
- History
- Experience
- Animal
- Woman
- Feeling
- Ecstasy of experience

# Blake (1757 – 1827)



# The Creative Vision

'My Eyes did Expand  
Into regions of air  
Away from all care  
Into regions of fire  
Remote from Desire

...

I each particle gazed  
Astonished Amazed  
For each was a Man  
Human formed. Swift I ran  
For they beckoned to me  
Remote by the sea  
Saying, Each grain of Sand  
Every Stone on the Land  
Each rock & each hill  
Each fountain and rill  
Each herb and each tree  
Mountain hill Earth & Sea  
Cloud Meteor & Star

.

Are men seen from afar'

# JCP: Wolf Solent

‘He recalled the figure of a man he had seen on the steps outside Waterloo station. The inner despair upon the face that the figure had turned towards him. The face was repeated many times among those great curving masses of emerald green foliage...It was just the face of a man, of a mortal man, against whom Providence had grown as malignant as a mad dog...He would have said that his magnetic impulses resembled the expanding of the great vegetable leaves over a still pool...the great struggle going on in Nature between Good and Evil forces...Outward things, such as the terrible face on the Waterloo steps were to him like faintly-limned images in a mirror, the true reality of which lay in his mind...beneath the dark waters of his consciousness... I’ve learnt sir to get my happiness out of sensation’.

(*Wolf Solent*, Chapter 1)

# Blake and Nature

First, ere the morning breaks, joy opens in the flowery bosoms,  
Joy, even to tears, which the sun rising dries; first the wild thyme  
And meadow-sweet, downy & soft waving among the reeds,  
Light springing on the air, lead the sweet dance. They wake  
The Honeysuckle sleeping on the oak (the flaunting beauty  
Revels along upon the wind); the white-thorn, lovely may,  
Opens her many lovely eyes. Listening the rose still sleeps-  
None dare to wake her; soon she bursts her crimson-curtained bed  
And comes forth in the majesty of beauty. Every flower-  
The pink, the jasmine, the wall-flower, the carnation,  
The jonquil, the mild lily - opens her heavens. Every tree  
And flower & herb soon fill the air with innumerable dance,  
Yet in order sweet and lovely'.

*(Milton Plate 32)*

# Crabb Robinson reports on Blake

“The eloquent descriptions of Nature in Wordsworth's poems were conclusive proof of Atheism, **for whoever believes in nature said Blake: disbelieves in God** - for Nature is the work of the devil. On my obtaining from him the declaration that the Bible was the work of God, I referred to the commencement of Genesis - In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth - But I gained nothing by this for I was triumphantly told that this God was not Jehovah, but the Elohim, and the **doctrine of the Gnostics** repeated with sufficient consistency to silence one so unlearned as myself.”

# Elohin





'Natural Objects always did and do now weaken,  
deaden and obliterate Imagination in Me.

Wordsworth must know that what he Writes as  
valuable is Not to be Found in Nature'.

*(Annotations to Wordsworth Poems)*

# JCP: Image: Nature and Mind

- *Cymric*: 'All in Nature and all in Individual Consciousness'. 'everything in our solitary mind'.
- *Autobiography*: 'Imagination – tapping vast reservoir of planetary experience'.
- *Porius*: 'the true horror of nature'
- But images of the dead, mortified, cruelty, torture, sacrifice, 'imprisoned matter' - cloaked in images
- **Looking back at him**

# Gnosis/ Gnosticism

- <= Pre-socratic
- C2 Heretical Christianity (Gnostic Gospels)
- C12 Cathars – SW France
- C15 Renaissance: Corpus Hermeticum (100-300CE)
- C20 Esotericism







# Gnostic Myth

- Imperfect nature of Old Testament God
- Material World
- Feminine Spark
- Inner Personal Quest

# Creation Myth in Gnostic Gospels

'In the beginning the father intended to bring forth the angels and the archangels.

His thought leaped ahead from him.

This thought, who knew her father's intention.

Thus she descended to the lower realms

She bore angels and powers, who then created the world

But after she bore them she was held capture by them

She suffered every indignity from them

And she could not return to the father

In a human body she came to be confined

And thus from age to age she passed from body to body'.



# Sophia

'And they enclosed my infinite brain into a narrow circle  
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe  
burning

Till all from life I was obliterated and erased'

*(Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Plate 3)*

'Lost! Lost! Lost! are my emanations...

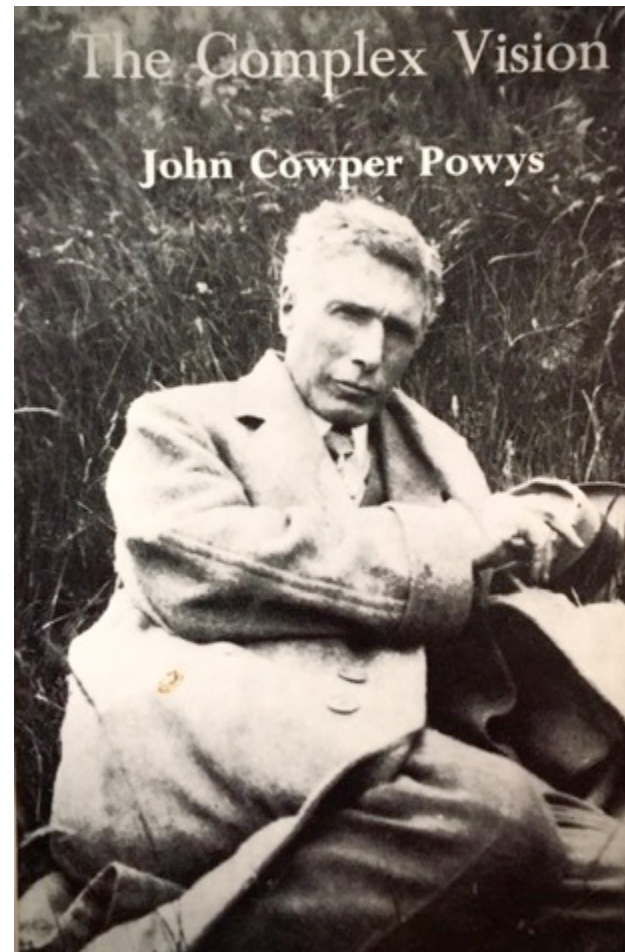
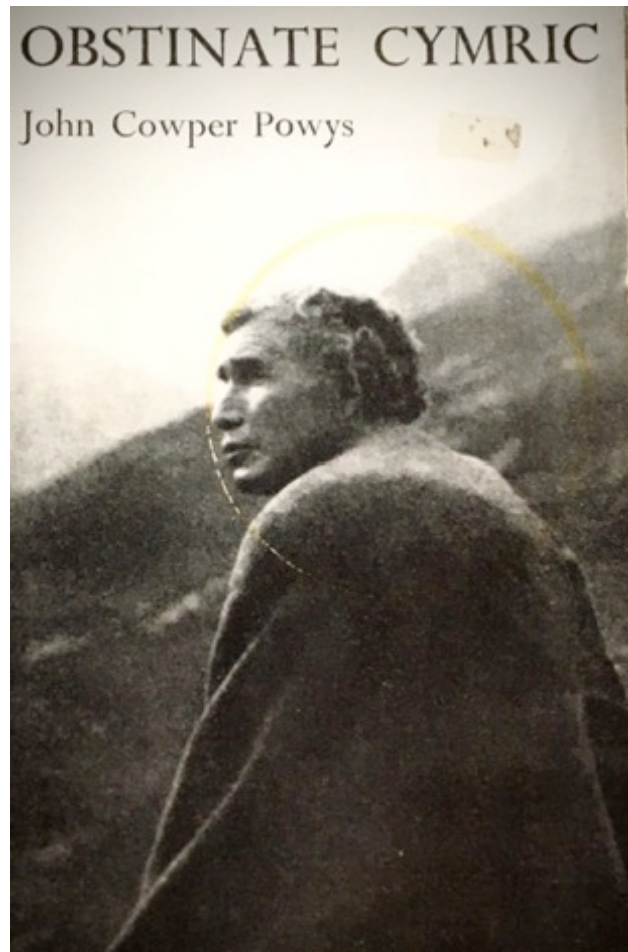
We are become a Victim to the Living We hide in  
secret

I have hidden Jerusalem in Silent Contrition O Pity Me'

*(Vala, Plate 4)*

Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. **Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point.** Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and say, 'My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.' Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate...If you carefully investigate these matters, **you will find him in yourself.**

*(C3 Monoimus)*



A PHILOSOPHY OF  
SOLITUDE

*by*  
JOHN COWPER POWYS



JONATHAN CAPE  
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE LONDON

IN DEFENCE OF SENSUALITY

*by*  
JOHN COWPER POWYS

*author of "Wolf Solent"*

LONDON  
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD  
14 Henrietta Street Covent Garden

# A Living Universe: JCP

- ‘We see to interpret the universe in terms of human life...an immense plurality of separate personal universes find...a single universe of immortal gods’ (*Complex Vision*, p. 164)
- Reason synthesis with imagination (instinct, imagination, intuition, experience Nature/ Humanity) (p. 251)
- ‘Our souls touch’ (p. 120)
- Unity = the emotion of love

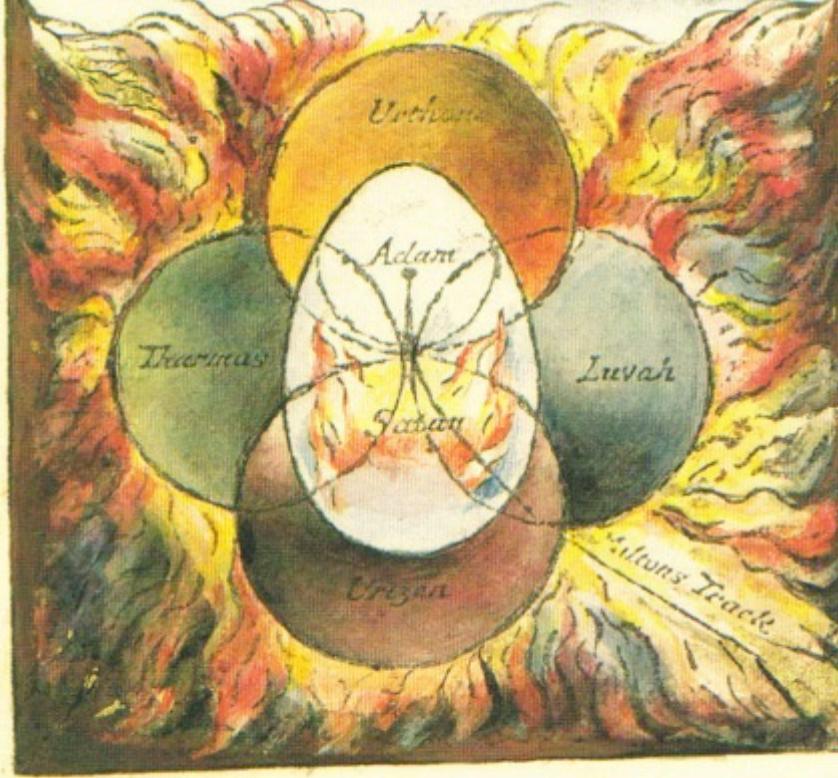
# Blake: Mundane Shell

- The Senses
- Zoas/ Archetypes
- Material / Spirit
- Male/ Female
- Their Relationships

And the Divine Voice was heard in the Songs of Beulah Say - 179

When I first Married you, I gave you all my whole Soul  
 I thought that you would love my loves & joy in my delights  
 Seeking for pleasures in my pleasures O Daughter of Babylon  
 Thou wast lovely, mild & gentle, now thou art terrible  
 In jealousy & unlovely in my sight, because thou hast cruelly  
 Cut off my loves in fits, till I have no love left, for they  
 Thy love depends on him, thou lovest & on his dear loves  
 Depend thy pleasures which thou hast cut off by jealousy  
 Therefore I shew my jealousy & set before you Death  
 Behold Milton descended to Redeem the Female Shade  
 From Death Eternal, such your lot, to be continually Redeem'd  
 By death & misery of those you love & by Annihilation  
 When the Sixfold Female perceives that Milton annihilates  
 Himself; that seeing all his loves by her cut off; he leaves  
 Her also; entirely abstracting himself from Female loves  
 She shall relent in fear of death; She shall begin to give  
 Her maidens to her husband; delighting in his delight  
 And then & then alone begins the happy Female joy  
 As it is done in Beulah, & thou O Virgin Babylon Mother of Whores  
 Shalt bring Jerusalem in thine arms in the night watches; and  
 No longer turning her a wandering Harlot in the streets  
 Shalt give her into the arms of God your Lord & Husband.

Such are the Songs of Beulah in the Luminations of Olorun



# The Four Zoas

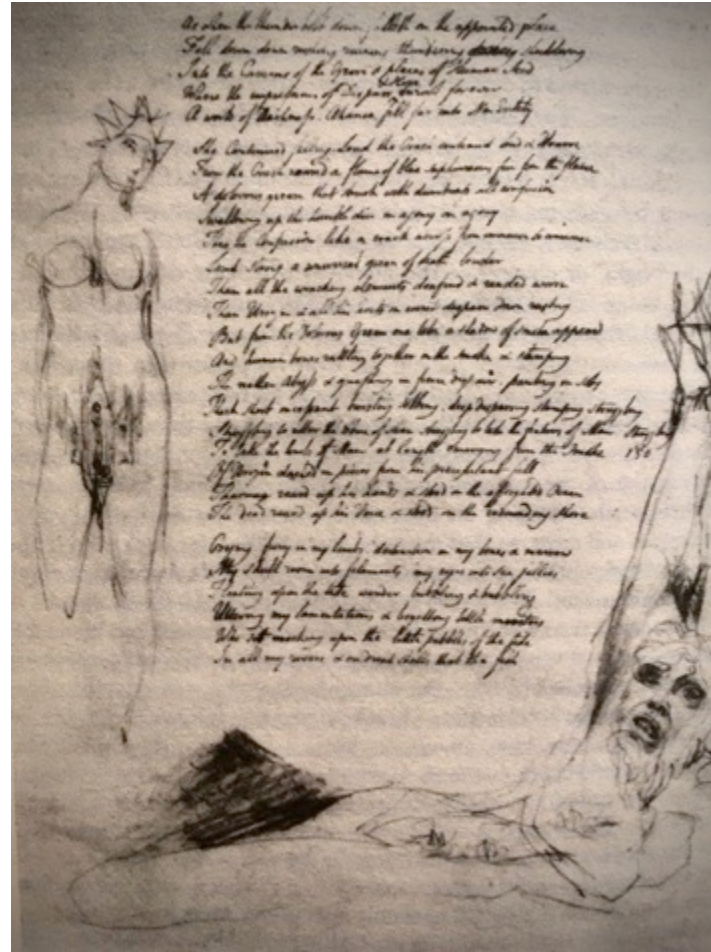
## Male: Spectre

- Urizen - Reason
- Tharmas - Sensation
- Luvah - Passion
- Urthona - Imagination

## Female: Emanation

- Ahaniah - Pleasure
- Enion - Sex
- Vala - Body/ Nature
- Enitharmon - Care





# Nature and Matter

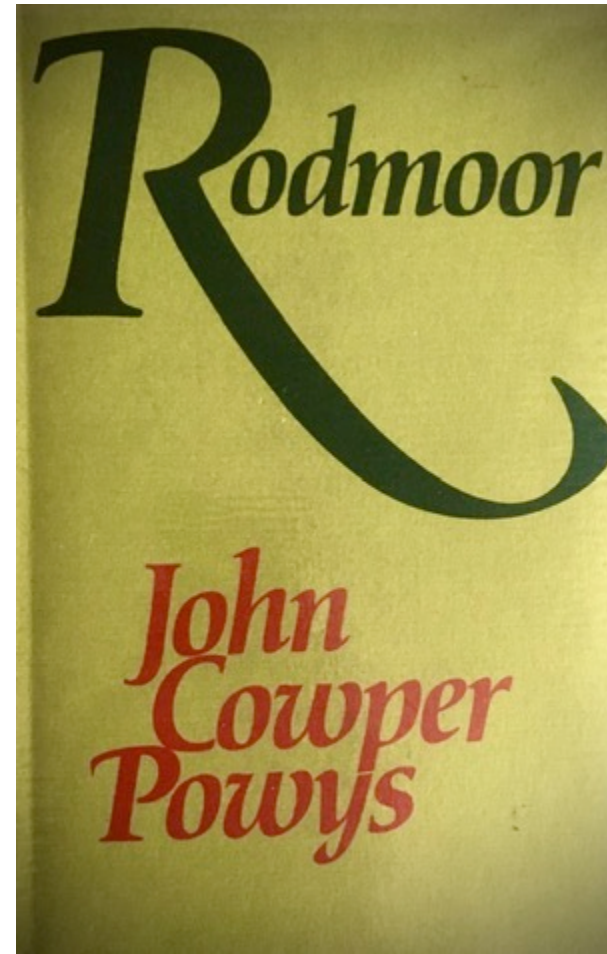
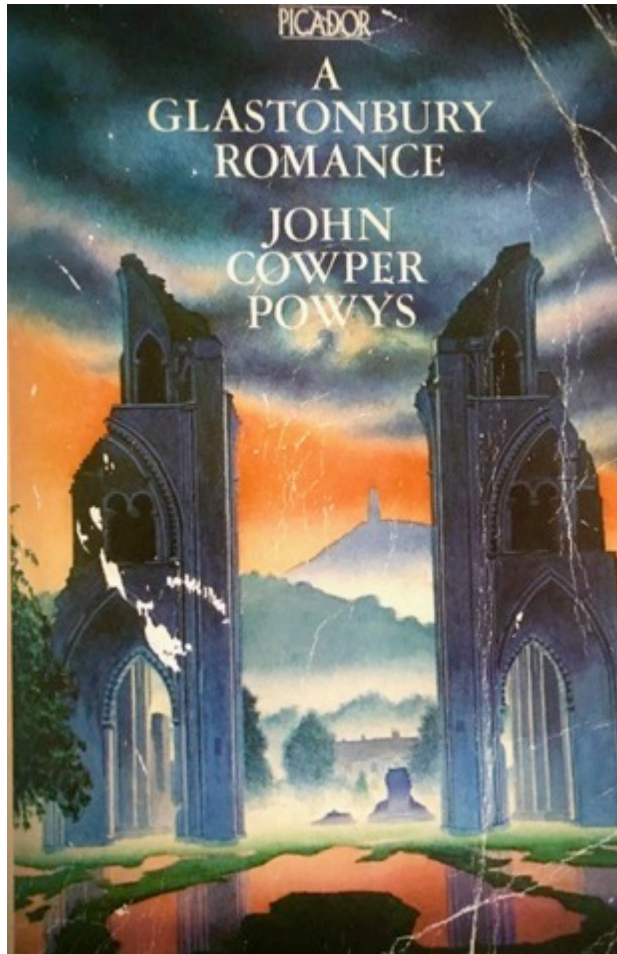
- Hermetic Tradition: Pythagoras, Boehme, Plotinus, Hermes Trismegistus
- Release of spirit imprisoned in matter.
- JCP : Harshness of nature
- *Brazen Head*: Roger Bacon (Black–Evil-Magician) Peter Peregrinus (White-Magician) – impregnates matter with female (Ghosta) and male energy (the wand of Merlin).
- *Blake: nature*

# **'Sexual' Union**

Androgyny

(The natural state of the soul)

# 'Prophecies'



# Blake

‘Although our human power can sustain the severe contentions of friendship, our sexual cannot but flies into the Ulro (Chaos)’

# Sex/ Androgyny

## Blake

- Sexual Distress
- Hermaphrodite
- Children: Innocence and Experience
- Fusing of the sexes
- Beulah – ('Married' Life – subconscious – source of imagination)

## JCP

- Fear of Women
- *Rodmoor*: Adrian Sorios – vision of son Baptiste Andogenous figure. 'Angel of Nothingness' he craves
- *Ducdame*: Rook Ashover – vision of your man with his own face.
- Glastonbury: Sam's love with Nell and Mad Beth but chooses ascetic life – source of vision
- *Ducdame* - Witch Betsy – 'Cimmery Land' – 'Folks live like Unborn babes'

All Human Forms identified with Fire, Metal, Earth & Stone, all  
Human Forms identified with pain, birth & returning wearied  
into the Pleasure lives of Youth's Months Days & Hours, repose  
and then wisdom into his Wisdom in the Life of Immortality.  
And I heard the Name of that Emanation, they are named Jerusalem.

The End of The Song  
of Jerusalem



The **Holy of Holies** is the bridal chamber. Baptism includes the resurrection (and the) redemption; the redemption (takes place) in the bridal chamber...**Christ came to repair the separation** which was from the beginning and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation and unite them. But the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. Indeed, **those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated.**

*(The Gospel of Philip)*



'They themselves are the truth; and the Father is within them and they are in the Father, being perfect, being undivided in the truly good one, being in no way deficient in anything'.

*The Gospel of Truth*

# The Self

I – Not I

# JCP

## Self: I not I

- 'I know of no human being less a mystic than me...I was not born to be a pantheist' (*Confessions*, p. 31)
- 'My dominant life illusion was to be a magician... who converts god's reality into his own reality'.
- Cloak with an image
- Sensuality - Alone
- Childlike view
- 'New emotional psychology' (*Sensuality*, p.172)

# Images

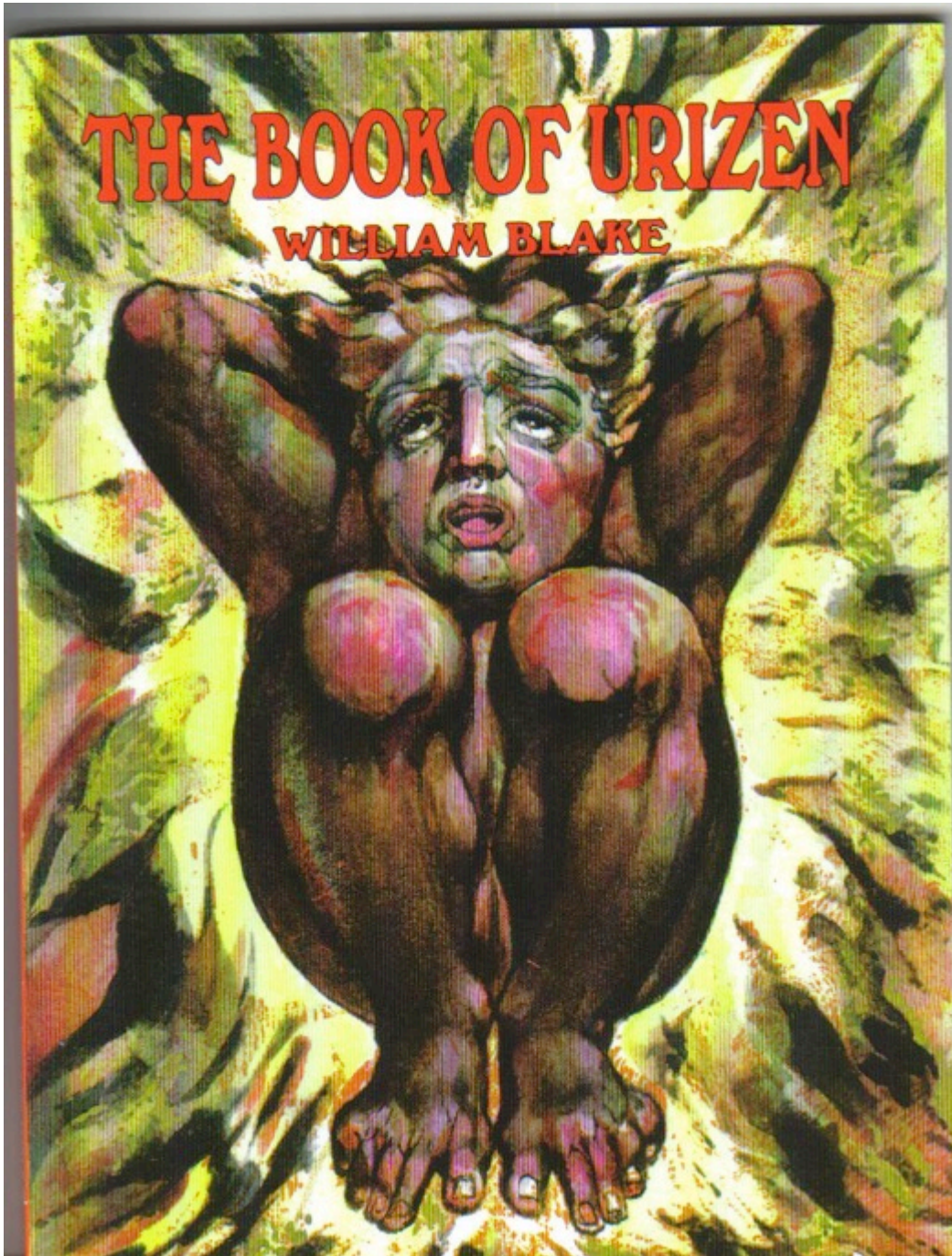
Truth did not enter this world unclad, **but it came in types and images.** The world will not receive truth in any other manner. There is rebirth and there is an image of rebirth. **It is truly necessary that the human being should be born again through the image.** If one does not acquire the images for oneself the name will also be taken away from one. But if one receives them in the anointing of the Pleroma (of the might of the cross), which the apostles call the right and the left, **then such a person is no longer a Christian but a Christ.**

*(Gospel of Philip)*



# THE BOOK OF URIZEN

WILLIAM BLAKE



If you bring forth what is in you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is in you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you  
(*Gospel of Philip*)

# Meister Eckhart

When the soul wishes to experience something, she throws out an image of the experience before her and enters into her own image.

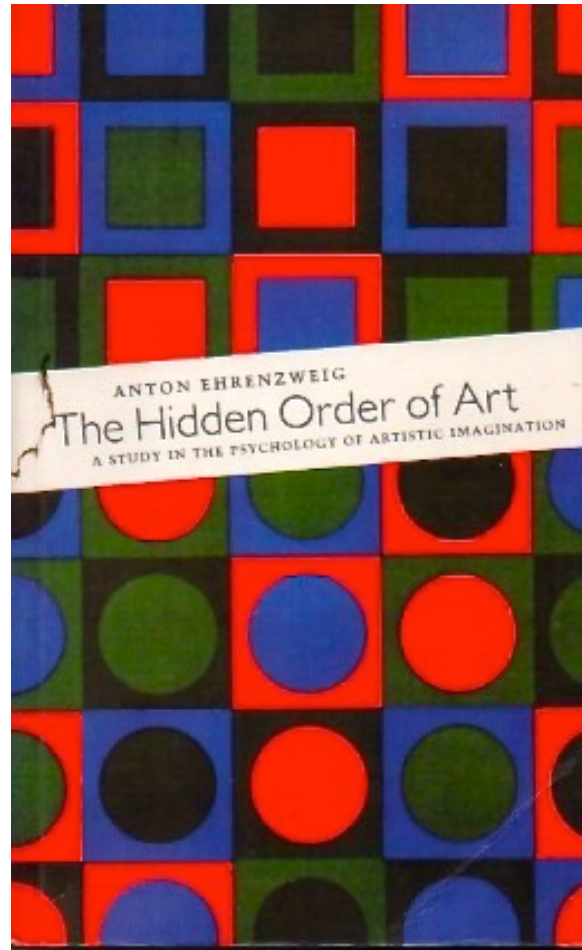


# Sensation/ Imagination

## First Cause

- Cruel
- Fear
- Indignation
- Suffering
- Inanimate
- Satan (Hell)
- Jehovah
- Artist
- Beauty
- Gratitude
- Creative
- Animate
- God (Heaven)
- Jesus

# The Hidden Order of Art (Psychology of Creativity)



# Epistemology of Creativity

- Externalisation  
(Schizoid fragments)
- Objectification  
(unconscious scan)
- Reintegration (re-  
introjection)
- Theme of the Dying God
- Exaltation.  
Multiplication,  
Projection
- Lower liberates the  
higher
- Fall and Ascension
- Subversion of subject

# Images: Source/ Effect

- JCP: Really 'living god' or a projection?' (*Complex Vision*, p. 132)
- 'Immune to all invasion' (*Solitude*, p. 63)
- Blake: *The Crystal Cabinet*

# JCP: Soul Stuff

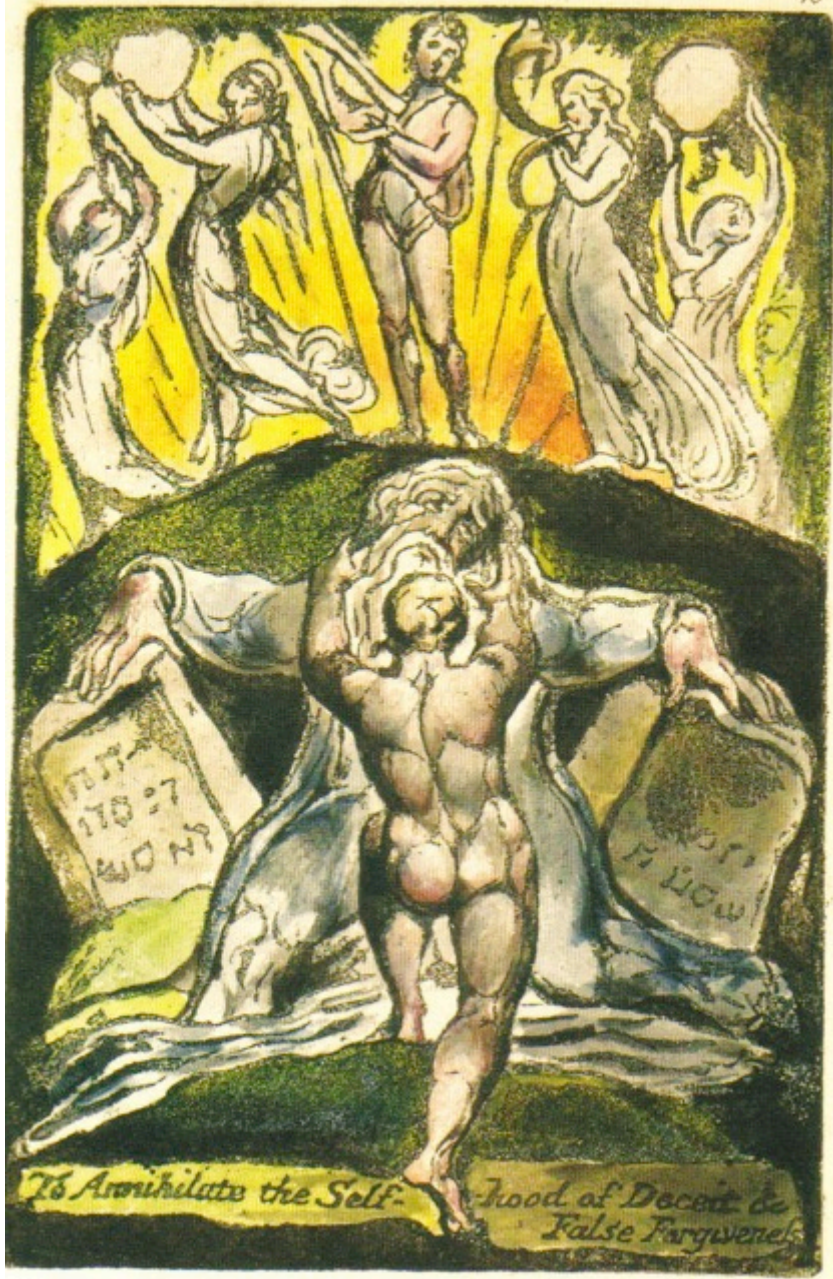
- ‘Love’ and ‘Malice’ (*Complex, ix*)
- Process of ‘being’
  - Set Boundary
  - Establish Autonomy
  - I am I (Central Zone of Inviolability)

# JCP: Complex Vision

## Apex Thought

- Eternal vision
- ‘Ourselves and not ourselves’ Self and liberation from self’ (p. 134)
- ‘Get ourselves out of the way’
- Apex Thought
- Mass of Flames: Horizontal pyramid: Arrow cleaving the darkness: Invisible: Cosmic Consciousness
- Non Ego

**‘To annihilate the selfhood of  
Deceit and false forgiveness’**



To Annihilate the Self. Hood of Deceit & False Forgiveness



I come in self-annihilation & grandeur of inspiration,  
To cast off rational demonstration by faith in the Saviour;  
To cast off the **rotten rags of memory by inspiration**;  
To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albion's covering;  
**To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with imagination;**  
**To cast aside from poetry all that is not inspiration**

.....

These are the destroyers of Jerusalem, these are the murders  
Of Jesus, who deny the faith & mock eternal life;  
Who pretend to poetry, that they may destroy imagination  
By imitation of nature's images drawn from remembrance,  
These are the sexual garments, the abomination of desolation  
Hiding the human lineaments as with an ark & curtains  
Which Jesus rent & now shall wholly purge away with fire,  
Till generation is swallowed up in regeneration

*(Milton Plate 41)*

# Memory: JCP and Blake

- Memory ‘purges reality’; stirs essences; indescribable transport (*Solitude*, p. 108)
- ‘I am a reactionary – so is the Devil – God stirs things and the past gets lost in the future’ (*Autobiography*, p. 274)
- ‘When you carry the past back...it becomes the chaos...being.. (ibid.)
- Childlike?
- *Blake: ‘Tear down the Gates of Memory’*

# **'Overtone of Awareness'**

## *Levels of Consciousness*

'You saw the spirit, you became the spirit. You saw the Father, you shall become the father. You see yourself and **what you see you shall become**'.

*(Gospel of Philip)*

'They became what they beheld'

*(Jerusalem, plate 32)*



W.B. 1780

*Albion rose from where he laboured at the Mill with Slaves  
Giving himself for the Nations he starv'd the same at L. and C. 1780*

# JCP: Heaven and/ or Hell?

‘Shall I agree with Blake that Heaven and Hell are close....is it true that the prismatic bubbles of truth which rise most beautifully, and float on the air the lightest, come from the consummation of the marriage of these antipodes? *I am not sure*’.

*(Autobiography, p. 453)*

# Blake and JCP

- JCP looks for the product *of* Imagination:  
Blake looks to Imagination itself  
(Consciousness)
- Blake: Jesus *is* the Imagination
- JCP: 'my imagination converts every mental process into a ritualistic symbol...god's world into my own' (*Autobiography*, p. 104)

# Subject/ Object Relation

Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point. (Breton: *Second Manifesto*, p. 123)

**The End**

*Thank you*