

# William Blake

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia  
**William Blake**



William Blake in an 1807 portrait by Thomas Phillip

**Born:** November 28, 1757  
🇬🇧 London, England

**Died:** August 12, 1827  
🇬🇧 London, England

**Occupation:** Poet, Painter, Printmaker

**William Blake** (November 28, 1757 – August 12,

1827) was an English poet, visionary, painter, and printmaker. Largely unrecognized during his lifetime, Blake's work is today considered seminal and significant in the history of both poetry and the visual arts. He was voted 38th in a poll of the 100 Greatest Britons organized by the BBC in 2002.

According to Northrop Frye, who undertook a study of Blake's entire poetic corpus, his prophetic poems form "what is in proportion to its merits the least read body of poetry in the English language." Others have praised Blake's visual artistry, at least one modern critic proclaiming Blake "far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced."<sup>[1]</sup> Once considered mad for his idiosyncratic views, Blake is highly regarded today for his expressiveness and creativity, and the philosophical vision that underlies his work. As he himself once indicated, "The imagination is not a State: it is the Human existence itself."

While his visual art and written poetry are usually considered separately, Blake often employed them in concert to create a product that at once defied and superseded convention. Though he believed himself able to converse aloud with Old Testament prophets, and despite his work in illustrating the Book of Job, Blake's affection for the Bible was

accompanied by hostility for the established Church, his beliefs modified by a fascination with Mysticism and the unfolding of the Romantic Movement around him.<sup>[2]</sup> Ultimately, the difficulty of placing William Blake in any one chronological stage of art history is perhaps the distinction that best defines him.

## **Contents**

- 1 Early life
  - 1.1 Apprenticeship to Basire
  - 1.2 The Royal Academy
  - 1.3 Marriage and early career
  - 1.4 Relief etching
- 2 Later life and career
  - 2.1 Dante's Inferno
  - 2.2 Blake's death
  - 2.3 Imagination
- 3 Blake and religion
- 4 Assessment
  - 4.1 Creative mindset
  - 4.2 Blake's Visions
- 5 Blake in popular culture
- 6 Bibliography
  - 6.1 Illuminated books
  - 6.2 Non-Illuminated
  - 6.3 Illustrated by Blake

- 6.4 On Blake
- 7 See also
- 8 References
- 9 External links

## Early life

William Blake was born in 28A Broad Street, Golden Square, London, England on 28 November 1757, to a middle-class family. He was the third of seven children, who consisted of one girl and six boys, two of whom died in infancy. Blake's father, James, was a hosier. He never attended school, being educated at home by his mother.<sup>[3]</sup> The Blakes were Dissenters, and are believed to have belonged to the Moravian church. The Bible was an early and profound influence on Blake, and would remain a source of inspiration throughout his life.

Blake began engraving copies of drawings of Greek antiquities purchased for him by his father (a further indication of the support his parents lent their son), a practice that was then preferred to actual drawing. Within these drawings Blake found his first exposure to classical forms, through the work of Raphael, Michelangelo, Marten

Heemskerck and Albrecht Dürer. His parents knew enough of his headstrong temperament that he was not sent to school but was instead enrolled in drawing classes. He read avidly on subjects of his own choosing. During this period, Blake was also making explorations into poetry; his early work displays knowledge of Ben Jonson and Edmund Spenser.

## **Apprenticeship to Basire**

On 4 August 1772, Blake became apprenticed to engraver James Basire of Great Queen Street, for the term of seven years. At the end of this period, at the age of 21, he was to become a professional engraver.

There is no record of any serious disagreement or conflict between the two during the period of Blake's apprenticeship. However, Peter Ackroyd's biography notes that Blake was later to add Basire's name to a list of artistic adversaries—and then cross it out.<sup>[4]</sup> This aside, Basire's style of engraving was of a kind held to be old-fashioned at the time, and Blake's instruction in this outmoded form may have had a detrimental effect on his struggles to acquire work or even recognition in

later life.

After two years Basire sent him to copy images from the Gothic churches in London (it is possible that this task was set in order to break up a quarrel between Blake and James Parker, his fellow apprentice), and his experiences in Westminster Abbey contributed to the formation of his artistic style and ideas; the Abbey of his day was decorated with suits of armour, painted funeral effigies and varicoloured waxworks. Ackroyd notes that "the most immediate [impression] would have been of faded brightness and colour".<sup>[5]</sup> In the long afternoons Blake spent sketching in the Abbey, he was occasionally interrupted by the boys of Westminster School, one of whom "tormented" Blake so much one afternoon that he knocked the boy off a scaffold to the ground, "upon which he fell with terrific Violence". Blake beheld more visions in the Abbey, of a great procession of monks and priests, while he heard "the chant of plain-song and chorale".

---

### **The Royal Academy**

In 1778, Blake became a student at the Royal



The archetype of the Creator is a familiar image in his work.

Here, Blake depicts his demiurgic figure Urizen stooped in prayer, contemplating the world he has forged. The *Song of Los* is the third in a series of illuminated books painted by

Blake and his wife, collectively known as the *Continental Prophecies*.

Academy in Old Somerset House, near the Strand. While the terms of his study required no payment, he was expected to supply his own materials throughout the six-year period. There, he rebelled against what he regarded as the unfinished style of fashionable painters such as Rubens, championed by the school's first president, Joshua Reynolds. Over time, Blake came to detest

Reynolds' attitude toward art, especially his pursuit of "general truth" and "general beauty". Reynolds

wrote in his *Discourses* that the "disposition to abstractions, to generalizing and classification, is the great glory of the human mind"; Blake responded, in marginalia to his personal copy, that "To Generalize is to be an Idiot; To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit".<sup>[6]</sup> Blake also disliked Reynolds' apparent humility, which he held to be a form of hypocrisy. Against Reynolds' fashionable oil painting, Blake preferred the Classical precision of his early influences, Michelangelo and Raphael.

In June 1780, Blake was walking towards Basire's shop in Great Queen Street when he was swept up by a rampaging mob that stormed Newgate Prison in London. Many among the mob were wearing blue cockades on their caps, to symbolise solidarity with the insurrection in the American colonies. They attacked the prison gates with shovels and pickaxes, set the building ablaze, and released the prisoners inside. Blake was reportedly in the front rank of the mob during this attack; most biographers believe he accompanied the crowd impulsively.

These riots, in response to a parliamentary bill revoking sanctions against Roman Catholicism, later came to be known as the Gordon Riots; they



provoked a flurry of legislation from the government of George III, as well as the creation of the first police force.

## **Marriage and early career**

In 1782, Blake met John Flaxman, who was to become his patron, and Catherine Boucher, who was to become his wife. At the time, Blake was recovering from a relationship that had culminated in a refusal of his marriage proposal. Telling Catherine and her parents the story, she expressed her sympathy, whereupon Blake asked her, "Do you pity me?" To Catherine's affirmative response he responded, "Then I love you." Blake married Catherine – who was five years his junior – on 18 August 1782 in St. Mary's Church, Battersea. Illiterate, Catherine signed her wedding contract with an 'X'. Later, in addition to teaching Catherine to read and write, Blake trained her as an engraver; throughout his life she would prove an invaluable aid to him, helping to print his illuminated works and maintaining his spirits throughout numerous misfortunes.

At this time George Cumberland, one of the founders of the National Gallery, became an

admirer of Blake's work. Blake's first collection of poems, *Poetical Sketches*, was published around 1783. After his father's death, William and his brother Robert opened a print shop in 1784, and began working with radical publisher Joseph Johnson. Johnson's house was a place of meeting for some of the leading intellectual dissidents of the time in England: Joseph Priestley, scientist; Richard Price, philosopher; John Henry Fuseli;<sup>[7]</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, an early feminist; and Thomas Paine, American revolutionary. Along with William Wordsworth and William Godwin, Blake had great hopes for the American and French revolution and wore a red liberty cap in solidarity with the French revolutionaries, but despaired with the rise of Robespierre and the Reign of Terror in the French revolution.

Blake illustrated *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788; 1791) by Mary Wollstonecraft. They seem to have shared some views on sexual equality and the institution of marriage, but there is no evidence proving without doubt that they actually met. In 1793's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake condemned the cruel absurdity of enforced chastity and marriage without love and defended the right of women to complete self-fulfillment.

## Relief etching

In 1788, at the age of 31, Blake began to experiment with relief etching, a method he would use to produce most of his books, paintings, pamphlets and of course his poems, including his longer 'prophecies' and his masterpiece the "Bible". The process is also referred to as illuminated printing, and final products as illuminated books or prints. Illuminated printing involved writing the text of the poems on copper plates with pens and brushes, using an acid-resistant medium. Illustrations could appear alongside words in the manner of earlier illuminated manuscripts. He then etched the plates in acid in order to dissolve away the untreated copper and leave the design standing in relief (hence the name). This is a reversal of the normal method of etching, where the lines of the design are exposed to the acid, and the plate printed by the intaglio method. Relief etching, which Blake invented, later became an important commercial printing method. The pages printed from these plates then had to be hand-colored in water colors and stitched together to make up a volume. Blake used illuminated printing for most of his well-known works, including *Songs of*

*Innocence and Experience, The Book of Thel, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and Jerusalem.*



Blake's "Newton" is a demonstration of his opposition to the "single-vision" of scientific materialism: The great philosopher-scientist is isolated in the depths of the ocean, his eyes (only one of which is visible) fixed on the compasses with which he draws on a scroll. He seems almost at one with the rocks upon which he sits (1795).

## Later life and career

Blake's marriage to Catherine remained a close and devoted one until his death. There were early problems, however, such as Catherine's illiteracy and the couple's failure to produce children. Gilchrist refers to "stormy times" in the early years of the marriage.<sup>[8]</sup> It

is possible that at one point, in accordance with the beliefs of the Swedenborgian Society, Blake suggested bringing in a concubine.<sup>[9]</sup> Catherine was distressed at the idea, and Blake promptly withdrew it. Blake taught her to write, and she

helped him to colour his printed poems.<sup>[10]</sup>

Around the year 1800 Blake moved to a cottage at Felpham in Sussex (now West Sussex) to take up a job illustrating the works of William Hayley, a minor poet. It was in this cottage that Blake wrote *Milton: a Poem* (published between 1805 and 1808). The preface to this work includes a poem beginning "*And did those feet in ancient time*", which became the words for the patriotic song, "Jerusalem". Over time, Blake came to resent his new patron, coming to believe that Hayley was not paying as well as he could afford to pay.

Blake returned to London in 1802 and began to write and illustrate *Jerusalem* (1804–1820), his most ambitious work. Having conceived the idea of portraying the characters in Chaucer's *Canterbury Pilgrims*, Blake approached the dealer Robert Cromek, with a view to marketing an engraving. Knowing that Blake was too eccentric to produce a popular work, Cromek promptly commissioned Thomas Stothard to execute the concept. When Blake learned that he had been cheated, he broke off contact with Stothard, formerly a friend. He also set up an independent exhibition in his brother's shop, designed to market his own version of the Chaucer illustration, along

with other works. As a result he wrote his *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809), which contains what Anthony Blunt has called a "brilliant analysis" of Chaucer. It is regularly anthologised as a classic of Chaucer criticism.<sup>[11]</sup> It also contained detailed explanations of his other paintings.

He was introduced by George Cumberland to a young artist named John Linnell. Through Linnell he met Samuel Palmer, who belonged to a group of artists who called themselves the Shoreham Ancients. This group shared Blake's rejection of modern trends and his belief in a spiritual and artistic New Age. At the age of 65 Blake began work on illustrations for the *Book of Job*. These works were later admired by Ruskin, who compared Blake favourably to Rembrandt, and by Vaughan Williams, who based his ballet *Job: A Masque for Dancing* on a selection of the illustrations.

Blake abhorred  
slavery and

believed in racial and sexual equality.<sup>[12]</sup> Several of his poems and paintings express a notion of universal humanity: "As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various)". He retained an active interest

in social and political events for all his life, but was often forced to resort to cloaking social idealism and political statements in Protestant mystical allegory.

He rejected all forms of imposed authority; indeed, he was charged with assault and uttering seditious and treasonable

expressions against the King in 1803, though he later was cleared in the Chichester assizes of the charges. The charges were brought by a soldier called John Schofield after Blake had bodily removed him from his garden, allegedly exclaiming, "Damn the king. The soldiers are all slaves."<sup>[13]</sup> According to a report in the Sussex county paper, "The invented character of [the evidence] was ... so obvious that an acquittal



Blake's "A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows", an illustration to J. G. Stedman's *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796).

resulted."<sup>[14]</sup> Schofield was later depicted wearing "mind forged manacles" in an illustration to *Jerusalem*.<sup>[15]</sup>

Blake's views on what he saw as oppression and restriction of rightful freedom extended to the Church. His spiritual beliefs are evidenced in *Songs of Experience* (in 1794), in which he shows his own distinction between the Old Testament God, whose restrictions he rejected, and the New Testament God (Jesus Christ in Trinitarianism), whom he saw as a positive influence.

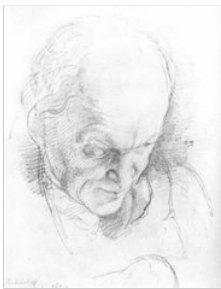
Later in his life Blake began to sell a great number of his works, particularly his Bible illustrations, to Thomas Butts, a patron who saw Blake more as a friend than a man whose work held artistic merit; this was typical of the opinions held of Blake throughout his life.

---

### **Dante's *Inferno***

The commission for Dante's *Inferno* came to Blake in 1826 through Linnell, with the ultimate aim of producing a series of engravings. However, Blake's death in 1827 would cut short the enterprise, and only a handful of the watercolours were completed, with only seven of the engravings arriving at proof





Portrait of William Blake  
drawn by John Linnell (1820)

form. Even so,  
they have evinced  
praise:

'[T]he Dante  
watercolors are  
among Blake's  
richest  
achievements,  
engaging fully  
with the problem  
of illustrating a  
poem of this  
complexity. The  
mastery of  
watercolour has  
reached an even

higher level than before, and is used to  
extraordinary effect in differentiating the  
atmosphere of the three states of being in the  
poem'. (David Bindman, "Blake as a Painter"  
in *The Cambridge Guide to William Blake*,  
Morris Eaves (ed.), Cambridge, 2003, p.  
106)

Blake's illustrations of the poem are not merely  
accompanying works, but rather seem to critically  
revise, or furnish commentary on, certain spiritual  
or moral aspects of the text. In illustrating

*Paradise Lost*, for instance, Blake seemed intent on revising Milton's focus on Satan as the central figure of the epic; for example, in *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve* (1808) Satan occupies an isolated position at the picture's top, with Adam and Eve centered below. As if to emphasise the effects of the juxtaposition, Blake has shown Adam and Eve caught in an embrace, whereas Satan may only onanistically caress the serpent, whose identity he is close to assuming.

In this instance, because the project was never completed, Blake's intent may itself be obscured. Some indicators, however, bolster the impression that Blake's illustrations in their totality would themselves take issue with the text they accompany: In the margin of *Homer Bearing the Sword and His Companions*, Blake notes, "Every thing in Dantes Comedia shews That for Tyrannical Purposes he has made This World the Foundation of All & the Goddess Nature & not the Holy Ghost." Blake seems to dissent from Dante's admiration of the poetic works of the ancient Greeks, and from the apparent glee with which Dante allots punishments in Hell (as evidenced by the grim humour of the cantos).

At the same time, Blake shared Dante's distrust of

materialism and the corruptive nature of power, and clearly relished the opportunity to represent the atmosphere and imagery of Dante's work pictorially. Even as he seemed to near death, Blake's central preoccupation was his feverish work on the illustrations to Dante's *Inferno*; he is said to have spent one of the very last shillings he possessed on a pencil to continue sketching. (*Blake Records*, 341)

### **Blake's death**

On the day of his death, Blake worked relentlessly on his Dante series. Eventually, it is reported, he ceased working and turned to his wife, who was in tears by his

bedside. Beholding her, Blake is said to have cried, "Stay Kate! Keep just as you are – I will draw your portrait – for you have ever been an angel to me." Having completed this portrait (now lost), Blake



*The Room in which William Blake Died, depicted by Frederic Shields*

laid down his tools and began to sing hymns and verses.<sup>[16]</sup> At six that evening, after promising his wife that he would be with her always, Blake died. Gilchrist reports that a female lodger in the same house, present at his expiration, said, "I have been at the death, not of a man, but of a blessed angel."<sup>[17]</sup>

George Richmond gives the following account of Blake's death in a letter to Samuel Palmer:

He died ... in a most glorious manner. He said He was going to that Country he had all His life wished to see & expressed Himself Happy, hoping for Salvation through Jesus Christ — Just before he died His Countenance became fair. His eyes Brighten'd and he burst out Singing of the things he saw in Heaven.<sup>[18]</sup>

Catherine paid for \_\_\_\_\_  
Blake's funeral  
with money lent to her by Linnell. He was buried five days after his death – on the eve of his forty-fifth wedding anniversary – at Dissenter's burial ground in Bunhill Fields, where his parents were also interred. Present at the ceremonies were Catherine, Edward Calvert, George Richmond,

Frederick Tatham  
and John Linnell.

Following Blake's  
death, Catherine  
moved into  
Tatham's house as  
a housekeeper.

During this  
period, she  
believed she was  
regularly visited  
by Blake's spirit.  
She continued  
selling his  
illuminated works  
and paintings, but

would entertain no business transaction without  
first "consulting Mr. Blake".<sup>[19]</sup> On the day of her  
own death, in October 1831, she was as calm and  
cheerful as her husband, and called out to him "as  
if he were only in the next room, to say she was  
coming to him, and it would not be long now".<sup>[20]</sup>

Upon her death, Blake's manuscripts were  
inherited by Frederick Tatham, who burned several  
of those which he deemed heretical or too  
politically radical. Tatham had become an



Monument near Blake's  
unmarked grave in London

Irvingite, one of the many fundamentalist movements of the 19th century, and was severely opposed to any work that smacked of blasphemy. [21] Sexual imagery in a number of Blake's drawings was also erased by John Linnell. [22]

Blake is now recognized as a saint in the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica. The Blake Prize for Religious Art was established in his honour in Australia in 1949.

In 1957 a memorial was erected in Westminster Abbey, in memory of him and his wife. [23]

### **Imagination**

Blake may have played a critical role in the modern Western World's conception of *imagination*. His belief that humanity could overcome the limitations of its five senses is perhaps Blake's greatest legacy: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite." (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) While his perspective was once perceived as merely aberrant, it now seems to have been incorporated into the modern definition of the term.

In particular, his reference to "the doors of perception" resonated demonstrably in the literature and music of the 20th century, as both Jim Morrison's band The Doors and Aldous Huxley's book *The Doors of Perception* pay homage to Blake's sentiment.

## **Blake and religion**

Although Blake's attacks on conventional religion were shocking in his own day, his rejection of religiosity was not a rejection of religion per se. His view of conventional religion is evident in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where he wrote in *Proverbs of Hell*:

*Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion and As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys.*

In *The Everlasting Gospel*, Blake does not present Jesus as a philosopher or traditional Messiah but as a supremely creative being, above dogma, logic and even morality:

If he had been Antichrist, Creeping

Jesus,  
He'd have done anything to please us:  
Gone sneaking into the Synagogues  
And not used the Elders & Priests like  
Dogs,  
But humble as a Lamb or an Ass,  
Obey himself to Caiaphas.  
God wants not man to humble himself

Jesus, for Blake, symbolises the vital relationship and unity between divinity and humanity: *all had originally one language and one religion: this was the religion of Jesus, the everlasting Gospel. Antiquity preaches the Gospel of Jesus.*

Blake designed his own mythology, which appears largely in his prophetic books. It was based mainly upon the Bible and on Greek mythology, to accompany his ideas about the everlasting Gospel. Blake commented that he had to *create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's.*

One of Blake's strongest objections to orthodox Christianity is that he felt it encouraged the suppression of natural desires and discouraged earthly joy. In *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, Blake says that *Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed & govern'd their*



*Passions or have No Passions, but because they have Cultivated their Understandings. The Treasures of Heaven are not Negations of Passion, but Realities of Intellect, from which all the Passions Emanate Uncurbed in their Eternal Glory.*

Blake believed that the joy of man glorified God and that the religion of this world is actually the worship of Satan. He thought of Satan as Error and the 'State of Death'. Blake believes that orthodox Christians, partly because of their denial of earthly joy, are actually worshipping Satan.

Blake was against the sophistry of theological thought that excuses pain, admits evil and apologises for injustice. He abhorred attempts to buy bliss in the next world with self-denial in this.

He saw the concept of 'sin' as a trap to bind men's desires (the briars of *Garden of Love*), and believed that restraint in obedience to a moral code imposed from the outside was against the spirit of life, writing:

Abstinence sows sand all over  
The ruddy limbs & flaming hair,  
But Desire Gratified

Plants fruits & beauty there.

He did not hold with the doctrine of God as Lord, an entity separate from and superior to mankind. This is very much in line with his belief in liberty and equality in society and between the sexes.

## **Assessment**

### **Creative mindset**

Northrop Frye, commenting on Blake's consistency in strongly held views, notes that Blake "himself says that his notes on [Joshua] Reynolds, written at fifty, are 'exactly Similar' to those on Locke and Bacon, written when he was 'very Young'. Even phrases and lines of verse will reappear as much as forty years later. Consistency in maintaining what he believed to be true was itself one of his leading principles ... Consistency, then, foolish or otherwise, is one of Blake's chief preoccupations, just as 'self-contradiction' is always one of his most contemptuous comments".<sup>[24]</sup>

### **Blake's Visions**

From a young age, William Blake claimed to have

seen visions. The earliest instance occurred at the age of about eight or ten in Peckham Rye, London, when he reported seeing a tree filled with angels "bespangling every bough like stars." According to Blake's Victorian biographer Gilchrist, he returned home to report his vision, but only escaped being thrashed by his father through the intervention of his mother. Though all the evidence suggests that his parents were largely supportive, his mother seems to have been especially so, and several of Blake's early drawings and poems decorated the walls of her chamber.

On another occasion, Blake watched haymakers at work, and thought he saw angelic figures walking among them. In later life, his wife Catherine would recall the time he saw God's head "put to the window". The vision, Catherine reminded her husband, "Set you ascreaming."<sup>[25]</sup>

Blake claimed to experience visions throughout his life. They were often associated with beautiful religious themes and imagery, and therefore may have inspired him further with spiritual works and pursuits. Certainly, religious concepts and imagery figure centrally in Blake's works. God and Christianity constituted the intellectual center of his writings, from which he drew inspiration. In

addition, Blake believed that he was personally instructed and encouraged by Archangels to create his artistic works, which he claimed were actively read and enjoyed by those same Archangels.

In a letter to William Hayley, dated May 6, 1800, Blake writes:

"I know that our deceased friends are more really with us than when they were apparent to our mortal part. Thirteen years ago I lost a brother, and with his spirit I converse daily and hourly in the spirit, and see him in my remembrance, in the region of my imagination. I hear his advice, and even now write from his dictate."

In a letter to John Flaxman, dated September 21, 1800, Blake writes:

"[The town of] Felpham is a sweet place for Study, because it is more spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden Gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapours; voices of Celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, & their forms more distinctly seen; & my Cottage is also a Shadow of their houses. My Wife & Sister are both well, courting Neptune for an embrace... I am

more famed in Heaven for my works than I  
could well conceive. In my Brain are studies &  
Chambers filled with books & pictures of old,  
which I wrote & painted in ages of Eternity  
before my mortal life; & those works are the  
delight & Study of Archangels."

In a letter to Thomas Butts, dated April 25, 1803,  
Blake writes:

"Now I may say to you, what perhaps I should  
not dare to say to anyone else: That I can alone  
carry on my visionary studies in London  
unannoy'd, & that I may converse with my  
friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream  
Dreams & prophecy & speak Parables  
unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of  
other Mortals; perhaps Doubts proceeding  
from Kindness, but Doubts are always  
pernicious, Especially when we Doubt our  
Friends."

In *A Vision of the Last Judgement* Blake writes:  
"What," it will be Questioned, "When the Sun  
rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat  
like a Guinea?" Oh no, no, I see an innumerable  
company of the Heavenly host crying, "Holy,  
Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty."

William Wordsworth wrote: "There was no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott." [1], whilst others accept him as mystic and visionary. [26]

## **Blake in popular culture**

In addition to his influence on writers and artists, Blake's role as a song-writer and as an exponent of sexual and imaginative freedom have made him a uniquely influential figure in popular culture, especially since the 1960s. Far more than any other canonical writer his songs have been set and adapted by popular musicians including U2, Van Morrison, Jah Wobble, Tangerine Dream, Bruce Dickinson Kathleen Yearwood and Ulver. Folk musicians have adapted his work, and figures such as Bob Dylan and Allen Ginsberg have been influenced by him. The genre of the graphic novel traces its origins to Blake's etched songs and Prophetic Books. Children's author Maurice Sendak and exponents such as Grant Morrison, Robert Crumb, and J.M. DeMatteis have all cited Blake as one of their major inspirations.

# Bibliography

## Illuminated books

- c.1788: *All Religions Are One*
  - *There Is No Natural Religion*
- 1789: *Songs of Innocence*
  - *The Book of Thel*
- 1790–1793: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- 1793: *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*
  - *America: a Prophecy*
- 1794: *Europe: a Prophecy*
  - *The First Book of Urizen*
  - *Songs of Experience*
- 1795: *The Book of Los*
  - *The Song of Los*
  - *The Book of Ahania*
- c.1804–c.1811: *Milton: a Poem*
- 1804–1820: *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion*

## Non-Illuminated

- 1783: *Poetical Sketches*
- 1789: *Tiriel*
- 1791: *The French Revolution*

- 1797: *The Four Zoas*

## Illustrated by Blake

- 1791: Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life*
- 1797: Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*
- 1805-1808: Robert Blair, *The Grave*
- 1808: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*
- 1819-1820: John Varley, *Visionary Heads*
- 1821: R.J. Thornton, *Virgil*
- 1823-1826: *The Book of Job*
- 1825-1827: Dante, *The Divine Comedy*  
(Blake died in 1827 with these watercolours still unfinished)

## On Blake

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Peter Ackroyd (1995). <i>Blake</i>. Sinclair-Stevenson. ISBN 1-85619-278-4.</li> <li>■ Donald Ault (1974). <i>Visionary Physics: Blake's Response to Newton</i>. University of Chicago. ISBN 0-226-03225-6.</li> <li>■ ---(1987). <i>Narrative</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ W.J.T. Mitchell (1978). <i>Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry</i>. Yale University Press. ISBN 0-691-01402-7.</li> <li>■ Victor N. Paananen (1996). <i>William Blake</i>. Twayne Publishers. ISBN 0-</li> </ul> |
|--|--|



*Unbound: Re-Visioning William Blake's The Four Zoas*. Station Hill Press. ISBN-10 1886449759.

- G.E. Bentley Jr. (2001). *The Stranger From Paradise: A Biography of William Blake*. Yale University Press. ISBN 0-300-08939-2.
- Harold Bloom (1963). *Blake's Apocalypse*. Doubleday.
- Jacob Bronowski (1972). *William Blake and the Age of Revolution*. Routledge and K. Paul. ISBN 0-7100-7277-5 (hardcover) ISBN 0-7100-7278-3 (pbk.)
- ——— (1967). *William Blake, 1757-1827; a man without a mask*. Haskell House Publishers.
- G.K. Chesterton

8057-7053-4.

- George Anthony Rosso Jr. (1993). *Blake's Prophetic Workshop: A Study of The Four Zoas*. Associated University Presses. ISBN 0-8387-5240-3.
- Sheila A. Spector (2001). *"Wonders Divine": the development of Blake's Kabbalistic myth*, (Bucknell UP)
- Algernon Swinburne, *William Blake: A Critical Essay*, (London, 1868)
- E.P. Thompson (1993). *Witness against the Beast*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-22515-9.
- W. M. Rosetti (editor), *Poetical Works of William Blake*, (London, 1874)

- (1920s). *William Blake*. House of Stratus ISBN 0-7551-0032-8.
- S. Foster Damon (1979). *A Blake Dictionary*. Shambhala. ISBN 0-394-73688-5.
  - David V. Erdman (1977). *Blake: Prophet Against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times*. Princeton University Press. ISBN 0-486-26719-9.
  - Irving Fiske (1951). "Bernard Shaw's Debt to William Blake." (Shaw Society)
  - Northrop Frye (1947). *Fearful Symmetry*. Princeton Univ Press. ISBN 0-691-06165-3.
  - Alexander Gilchrist, *Life and Works of William Blake*,
  - A. G. B. Russell (1912). *Engravings of William Blake*.
  - Basil de Sélincourt, *William Blake*, (London, 1909)
  - Joseph Viscomi (1993). *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, (Princeton UP). ISBN 0-691-06962-X.
  - David Weir (2003). *Brahma in the West: William Blake and the Oriental Renaissance*, (SUNY Press)
  - Jason Whittaker (1999). *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, (Macmillan)
  - W. B. Yeats (1903). *Ideas of Good and Evil*. Contains essays.

(second edition,  
London, 1880)

- James King (1991). *William Blake: His Life*. St. Martin's Press. ISBN 0-312-07572-3.
- Dr. Malkin (1806). *A Father's Memories of his Child*.
- Peter Marshall (1988). *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* ISBN 0-900384-77-8

## See also

- Dead Man
- Hercules Road, Lambeth, where William Blake lived
- Themes from William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by Ulver
- William Blake's mythology
- William Blake's prophetic books
- List of Christian mystics
- The Great Red Dragon Paintings

## References

1. ^ Jones, Jonathan (2005-04-25). Blake's heaven. The Guardian.
2. ^ Kazin, Alfred (1997). An Introduction to William Blake. Retrieved on 2006-09-23.
3. ^ Raine, Kathleen (1970). *World of Art: William Blake*. Thames & Hudson. ISBN 0-500-20107-2.
4. ^ 43, *Blake*, Peter Ackroyd, Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995
5. ^ 44, *Blake*, Ackroyd
6. ^ Erdman, David V. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 2nd edition, p641. ISBN 0-385-15213-2.
7. ^ Biographies of William Blake and Henry Fuseli, retrieved on May 31st 2007.
8. ^ Gilchrist, Life of William Blake, 1863, p. 316
9. ^ Schuchard, MK, *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, Century, 2006, p. 3
10. ^ Bentley, G. E, *Blake Records*, p 341
11. ^ Blunt, Anthony, *The Art of William Blake*, p 77
12. ^ William Blake's Ecofeminism, retrieved on May 31st 2007.
13. ^ The Gothic Life of William Blake: 1757-1827
14. ^ Lucas, E.V. (1904). *Highways and byways in Sussex*. Macmillan. ASIN B-0008-5GBS-C.
15. ^ Peterfreund, Stuart, *The Din of the City in Blake's Prophetic Books*, ELH - Volume 64, Number 1, Spring 1997, pp. 99-130
16. ^ Ackroyd, *Blake*, 389
17. ^ Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, London, 1863, 405
18. ^ Grigson, *Samuel Palmer*, p. 38
19. ^ Ackroyd, *Blake*, 390
20. ^ *Blake Records*, p. 410

21. ^ Ackroyd, *Blake*, p. 391
22. ^ Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried: Swedenburg, Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision*, pp. 1-20
23. ^ Tate UK. William Blake's London. Retrieved on 2006-08-26.
24. ^ Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, 1947, Princeton University Press
25. ^ Bentley, Gerald (1969). *Blake Record*. Oxford, p543. ISBN 0-415-13441-2.
26. ^ Encyclopaedia Britannica 15th edition
  - *This article incorporates public domain text from:* Cousin, John William (1910). *A Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature*. London, J.M. Dent & sons; New York, E.P. Dutton.
  - Peter Marshall. *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (1988) ISBN 0-900384-77-8

## External links

- Works by William Blake at Project Gutenberg
- The William Blake Archive, a multi-media archive, sponsored by the Library of Congress
- Tate's online resource on William Blake with notes for teachers
- See Blake's notebook online using the

British Library's Turning the Pages system (requires Shockwave).

- Contents, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake edited by David V. Erdman
- An Archive of an Exhibit of his Work at the National Gallery of Victoria
- Introduction to The Drawings and Engravings of William Blake, by Laurence Binyon at [www.the3graces.info](http://www.the3graces.info)
- Blue Neon Alley: Directory and Poems
- Poetry Archive: 170 poems of William Blake
- Paintings of William Blake
- Ch'an Buddhism and the Prophetic Poems of William Blake
- William Blake at Inspired Poetry
- A Blake Collector's Vade-Mecum
- William Blake and Visual Culture: A special issue of the journal *ImageText*
- *Narrative Unbound: Re-visioning William Blake's The Four Zoas* scholarly study of Blake by Donald Ault

Retrieved from

"[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Blake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake)"

Categories: Semi-protected | All articles with unsourced statements | Articles with unsourced

statements since March 2007 | William Blake |  
English poets | English painters | English  
printmakers | Romantic artists | Romantic poets |  
Fantastic art | Writers who illustrated their own  
writing | English anarchists | Swedenborgians |  
Western mystics | Druids | People from Soho |  
1757 births | 1827 deaths | Artist authors

---

- This page was last modified 12:08, 2 September 2007.
- All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.)  
Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a U.S. registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.