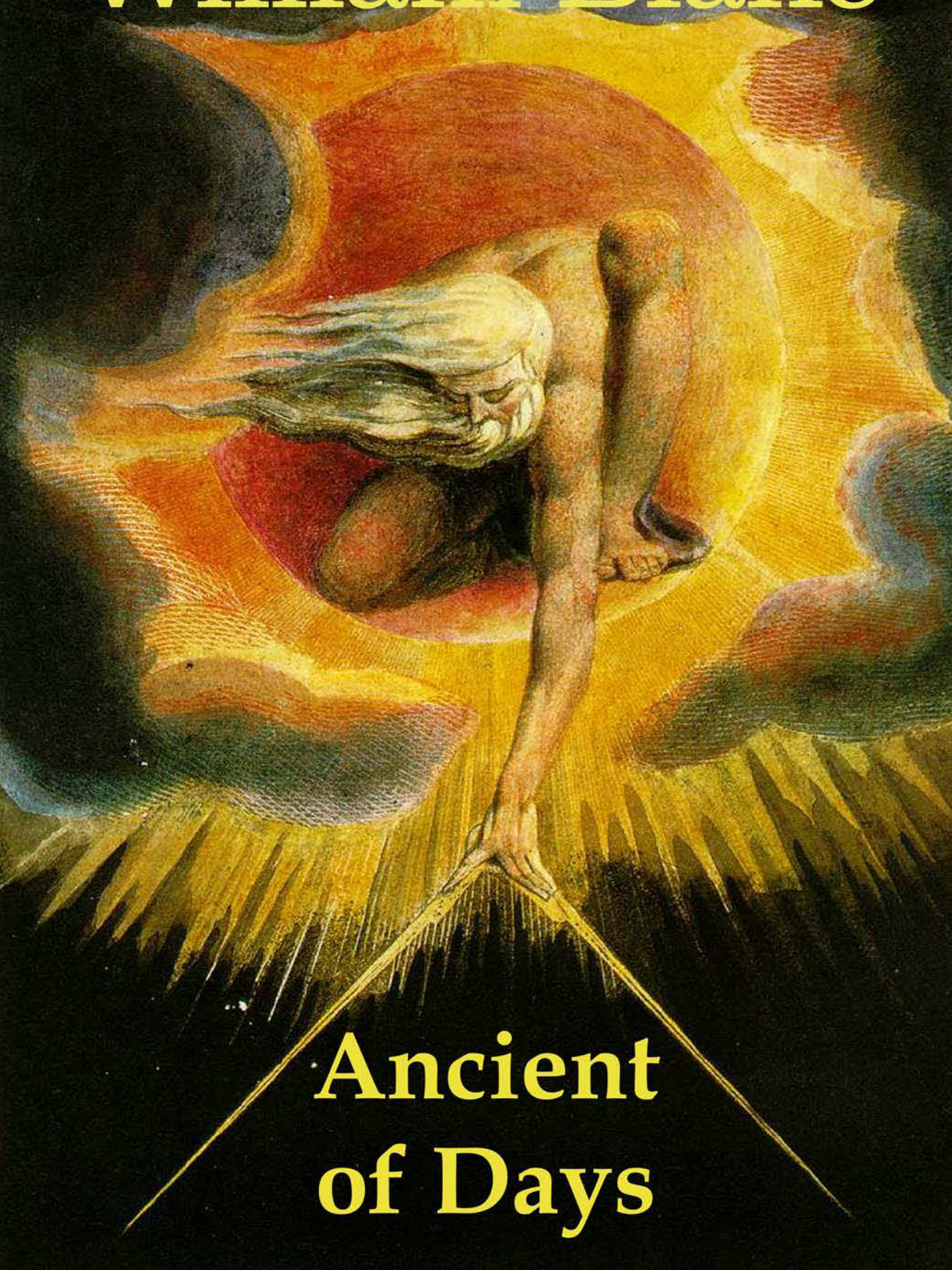


William Blake



Ancient of Days

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Ancient of Days

Selected poetry of **William
Blake**

Edited by Roy Taylor

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Introduction

Mystic, artist, illustrator, engraver, visionary, William Blake more than any other poet of his time leaves the reader feeling curiously unsatisfied with what they learn, thirsting for more.

Tantalisingly close to being understood one moment; the poet has a habit of vanishing from sight the next, leaving his reader floundering in the poor grasp of his work, unable to reach a decision as to whether what he reads are the words of wisdom of a man who flew far too close to God for comfort, or the bemused mutterings of an eccentric.

Countless works on Blake's collected writings have been published and in the 21st century he seems to be enjoying a much higher status than he ever did in his lifetime. Enough collections of his work exist to beg the question of why this work's come about.

Artists (and Blake, combining illustration, prose and poetry is nothing but) need to be understood through their work. The work of Blake is such, however, that to lay it loose on the reader is to achieve little beyond a fairly accurate impression of Blake's mercurial nature.

A pious man who seemed to despise the church, a moral writer who often spent his nights walking the streets of London looking at, and talking to prostitutes. A man of God who saw Angels from a very young age and yet also felt keenly the agony of the demons. A philosopher who could at times be incredibly shallow.

Blake was all that, occasionally all at the same time. The man is made all that much harder to decipher through his writings for the fact that he fails to date them, he starts collections dated with the date he expects to finish them by. Occasionally he goes back to work to re-touch it, finish it, start it again and at other times he leaves fragments incomplete; never returning to them at all.

In the work of most poets and artists we get a sense of their development as their work, dated, can be studied, analysed and -however imperfectly- be understood. Blake defies all that. A complex man to the last he left a body of prose, poetry and illustration behind of which only the last can be studied with any degree of chronological accuracy and then only through his engraving of 21 copperplates he did to illustrate the *Book of Job* in the *Old Testament*.

In truth he did a lot more work in his lifetime than this, but he was content to let other artists and engravers take the credit.

If Blake is to be understood. If he is to be revealed, it has to happen piecemeal. Parts of him have to be ‘sliced off’ held under the scrutiny of the reader and examined for his motivation and insights.

In selecting this collection I was asked to put together 12 pieces from Blake which would “showcase the man, be easy to read on a PC and carry around on a PDA”.

Twelve pieces from the hundreds Blake wrote in his lifetime are not nearly enough. I struggled for weeks. Weeks turned into months. I had trouble with the concept. Here was a great man. How could a dozen pieces selected by an editor be indicative of anything beyond the editor’s own preference of Blake?

Months would, most probably, have turned into years had it not been for the advice of my invaluable online friend, confidant and all-round genius [Cecil Adams](#) whose solution to my dilemma was suggested by his answer in one of his columns regarding a [Baker’s Dozen](#).

Editors, even those who give you the entire, collected works of an artist colour it with their own perception. They act, if you like, like a looking glass for the reader, revealing those parts of the artist, or drawing attention

to elements of their work they're particularly enamoured by or familiar with. No less human, I too, I decided would act like a looking glass, except my role would be that of a microscope.

The thirteen poems chosen here are largely in chronological order as far as that can be accurately decided. The one exception being *Auguries of Innocence* which predates some of the poems which precede it and which, yet belongs in the sequence I've placed it in, in terms of tone.

A true mystic Blake had come through the dark night of the soul but had failed to totally forsake its mood. Caught up in the passion of his vision, he failed to make any impact in his lifetime, etching a living off his pamphlets which sold slowly and for a lot less profit than those of his contemporaries whom he often sneered at in his poetry.

It is in these strands of dark, brooding passion, these flashing insights revealed in imagery that come like bolts of lightening through a pregnant sky that the true power of the poet comes to life.

I was tempted to modernise Blake's spelling and update his use of capitals and grammar. When I came to it, reading his work, I found his words wove an old spell, talked in my head with a voice past that had lost none of its majesty.

So, here they stand, pretty much as he wrote them. The selection is entirely my own. The brooding genius it reveals, stands lit by the beam of my own, very narrow focus. And yet, if Blake were to be remembered and understood by just these thirteen poems; his life would have been entirely justified.

Roy Taylor,
Miami
Dade County, USA, 2004.

The Angel

I Dreamt a Dream! what can it mean?
And that I was a maiden Queen:
Guarded by an Angel mild:
Witless woe, was ne'er beguil'd!

And I wept both night and day
And he wip'd my tears away
And I wept both day and night
And hid from him my hearts delight

So he took his wings and fled:
Then the morn blush'd rosy red:
I dried my tears & armed my fears,
With ten thousand shields and spears,

Soon my Angel came again;
I was arm'd, he came in vain:
For the time of youth was fled
And grey hairs were on my head.

The Tyger

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Garden of Love

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

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

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

The Little Vagabond

Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold,
But the Ale-house is healthy & pleasant & warm;
Besides I can tell where I am use'd well,
Such usage in heaven will never do well.

But if at the Church they would give us some Ale.
And a pleasant fire, our souls to regale;
We'd sing and we'd pray, all the live-long day;
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray,

Then the Parson might preach & drink & sing.
And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring:
And modest dame Lurch, who is always at Church,
Would not have bandy children nor fasting nor birch.

And God like a father rejoicing to see,
His children as pleasant and happy as he:
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil or the Barrel
But kiss him & give him both drink and apparel.

A Poison Tree

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

And I waterd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears:
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

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

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

A Little Boy Lost

Nought loves another as itself
Nor venerates another so.
Nor is it possible to Thought
A greater than itself to know:

And Father, how can I love you,
Or any of my brothers more?
I love you like the little bird
That picks up crumbs around the door.

The Priest sat by and heard the child.
In trembling zeal he siez'd his hair:
He led him by his little coat:
And all admir'd the Priestly care.

And standing on the altar high,
Lo what a fiend is here! said he:
One who sets reason up for judge
Of our most holy Mystery.

The weeping child could not be heard.
The weeping parents wept in vain:
They strip'd him to his little shirt.
And bound him in an iron chain.

And burn'd him in a holy place,
Where many had been burn'd before:
The weeping parents wept in vain.
Are such things done on Albions shore.

A Divine Image

Cruelty has a Human Heart
And Jealousy a Human Face
Terror, the Human Form Divine
And Secrecy, the Human Dress

The Human Dress, is forged Iron
The Human Form, a fiery Forge.
The Human Face, a Furnace seal'd
The Human Heart, its hungry Gorge.

I Saw A Monk Of Charlemaine

I saw a Monk of Charlemaine
Arise before my sight
I talkd with the Grey Monk as we stood
In beams of infernal light

Gibbon arose with a lash of steel
And Voltaire with a wracking wheel
The Schools in clouds of learning rolld
Arose with War in iron & gold.

Thou lazy Monk they sound afar
In vain condemning glorious War
And in your Cell you shall ever dwell
Rise War & bind him in his Cell.

The blood. red ran from the Grey Monks side
His hands & feet were wounded wide
His body bent, his arms & knees
Like to the roots of ancient trees

When Satan first the black bow bent
And the Moral Law from the Gospel rent
He forgd the Law into a Sword
And spilld the blood of mercys Lord.

Titus! Constantine! Charlemaine!
O Voltaire! Rousseau! Gibbon! Vain
Your Grecian Mocks & Roman Sword
Against this image of his Lord!

For a Tear is an Intellectual thing;
And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King

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And the bitter groan of a Martyrs woe
Is an Arrow from the Almighty's Bow!

To the Queen

The Door of Death is made of Gold,
That Mortal Eyes cannot behold;
But, when the Mortal Eyes are clos'd,
And cold and pale the Limbs repos'd,
The Soul awakes; and, wond'ring, sees
In her mild Hand the golden Keys:
The Grave is Heaven's golden Gate,
And rich and poor around it wait;
O Shepherdess of England's Fold,
Behold this Gate of Pearl and Gold!

To dedicate to England's Queen
The Visions that my Soul has seen,
And, by Her kind permission, bring
What I have borne on solemn Wing,
From the vast regions of the Grave,
Before Her Throne my Wings I wave;
Bowing before my Sov'reign's Feet,
"The Grave produc'd these Blossoms sweet
"In mild repose from Earthly strife;
"The Blossoms of Eternal Life!"

I Saw A Chapel All Of Gold

I saw a chapel all of gold
That none did dare to enter in
And many weeping stood without
Weeping mourning worshipping

I saw a serpent rise between
The white pillars of the door
And he forced & forced & forced
Down the golden hinges tore

And along the pavement sweet
Set with pearls & rubies bright
All his slimy length he drew
Till upon the altar white

Vomiting his poison out
On the bread & on the wine

Auguries of Innocence

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour
A Robin Red breast in a Cage
Puts all Heaven in a Rage
A Dove house filld with doves & Pigeons
Shudders Hell thro all its regions
A dog starvd at his Masters Gate
Predicts the ruin of the State
A Horse misusd upon the Road
Calls to Heaven for Human blood
Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear
A Skylark wounded in the wing
A Cherubim does cease to sing
The Game Cock clipd & armd for fight
Does the Rising Sun affright
Every Wolfs & Lions howl
Raises from Hell a Human Soul
The wild deer wandring here & there
Keeps the Human Soul from Care
The Lamb misusd breeds Public strife
And yet forgives the Butchers Knife
The Bat that flits at close of Eve
Has left the Brain that wont Believe
The Owl that calls upon the Night
Speaks the Unbelievers fright
He who shall hurt the little Wren
Shall never be belovd by Men
He who the Ox to wrath has movd
Shall never be by Woman lov'd

The wanton Boy that kills the Fly
Shall feel the Spiders enmity

He who torments the Chafers sprite
Weaves a Bower in endless Night
The Catterpillar on the Leaf
Repeats to thee thy Mothers grief
Kill not the Moth nor Butterfly
For the Last judgment draweth nigh
He who shall train the Horse to War
Shall never pass the Polar Bar
The Beggars Dog & Widows Cat
Feed them & thou wilt grow fat
The Gnat that sings his Summers song
Poison gets from Slanders tongue
The poison of the Snake & Newt
Is the sweat of Envys Foot
The Poison of the Honey Bee
Is the Artists jealousy
The Princes Robes & Beggars Rags
Are Toadstools on the Misers Bags
A truth thats told with bad intent
Beats all the Lies you can invent
It is right it should be so
Man was made for Joy & Woe
And when this we rightly know
Thro the World we safely go
Joy & Woe are woven fine
A Clothing for the soul divine
Under every grief & pine
Runs a joy with silken twine
The Babe is more than swadling Bands
Throughout all these Human Lands

Tools were made & Born were hands
Every Farmer Understands
Every Tear from Every Eye
Becomes a Babe in Eternity
This is caught by Females bright
And returnd to its own delight
The Bleat the Bark Bellow & Roar
Are Waves that Beat on Heavens Shore
The Babe that weeps the Rod beneath
Writes Revenge in realms of death
The Beggars Rags fluttering in Air
Does to Rags the Heavens tear
The Soldier armd with Sword & Gun
Palsied strikes the Summers Sun
The poor Mans Farthing is worth more
Than all the Gold on Africs Shore.

One Mite wrung from the Labrers hands
Shall buy & sell the Misers Lands
Or if protected from on high
Does that whole Nation sell & buy
He who mocks the Infants Faith
Shall be mock'd in Age & Death
He who shall teach the Child to Doubt
The rotting Grave shall neer get out
He who respects the Infants faith
Triumphs over Hell & Death
The Childs Toys & the Old Mans Reasons
Are the Fruits of the Two seasons
The Questioner who sits so sly
Shall never know how to Reply
He who replies to words of Doubt
Doth put the Light of Knowledge out

The Strongest Poison ever known
Came from Caesars Laurel Crown
Nought can Deform the Human Race
Like to the Armours iron brace
When Gold & Gems adorn the Plow
To peaceful Arts shall Envy Bow
A Riddle or the Crickets Cry
Is to Doubt a fit Reply
The Emmets Inch & Eagles Mile
Make Lane Philosophy to smile
He who Doubts from what he sees
Will neer Believe do what you Please
If the Sun & Moon should Doubt
Theyd immediately Go out
To be in a Passion you Good may Do
But no Good if a Passion is in you
The Whore & Gambler by the State
Licenced build that Nations Fate
The Harlots cry from Street to Street
Shall weave Old Englands winding Sheet
The Winners Shout the Losers Curse
Dance before dead Englands Hearse
Every Night & every Morn
Some to Misery are Born
Every Morn & every Night
Some are Born to sweet delight
Some are Born to sweet delight
Some are Born to Endless Night
We are led to Believe a Lie
When we see not Thro the Eye

Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night
When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light

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God Appears & God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in Night
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of day

The Everlasting Gospel

The Vision of Christ that thou dost see
Is my Visions Greatest Enemy
Thine has a great hook nose like thine
Mine has a snub nose like to mine
Thine is the Friend of All Mankind
Mine speaks in parables to the Blind
Thine loves the same world that mine hates
Thy Heaven doors are my Hell Gates
Socrates taught what Melitus
Loathd as a Nations bitterest Curse
And Caiphas was in his own Mind
A benefactor of Mankind
Both read the Bible day & night
But thou readst black where I read white

Was Jesus Humble or did he
Give any Proofs of Humility
Boast of high Things with Humble tone
And give with Charity a Stone
When but a Child he ran away
And left his Parents in Dismay
When they had wanderd three days long
These were the words upon his tongue
No Earthly Parents I confess
I am doing my Fathers business
When the rich learned Pharisee

Came to consult him secretly
Upon his heart with Iron pen
He wrote Ye must be born again
He was too proud to take a bribe
He spoke with authority not like a Scribe

He says with most consummate Art
Follow me I am meek & lowly of heart
As that is the only way to escape
The Misers net & the Gluttons trap
He who loves his Enemies betrays his Friends
This surely is not what Jesus intends
But the sneaking Pride of Heroic Schools
And the Scribes & Pharisees Virtuous Rules
For he acts with honest triumphant Pride
And this is the cause that Jesus died
He did not die with Christian Ease
Asking Pardon of his Enemies
If he had Caiphas would forgive
Sneaking submission can always live
He had only to say that God was the devil
And the devil was God like a Christian Civil
Mild Christian regrets to the devil confess
For affronting him thrice in the Wilderness
He had soon been bloody Caesars Elf
And at last he would have been Caesar himself
Like dr Priestly & Bacon & Newton
Poor Spiritual Knowledge is not worth a button
For thus the Gospel Sr Isaac confutes
God can only be known by his Attributes
And as for the Indwelling of the Holy Ghost
Or of Christ & his Father its all a boast
And Pride & Vanity of Imagination
That disdains to follow this Worlds Fashion
To teach doubt & Experiment
Certainly was not what Christ meant
What was he doing all that time
From twelve years old to manly prime
Was he then Idle or the Less

About his Fathers business
Or was his wisdom held in scorn
Before his wrath began to burn
In Miracles throughout the Land
That quite unnervd Lord Caiaphas hand
If he had been Antichrist Creeping Jesus
Hed have done any thing to please us
Gone sneaking into Synagogues

And not usd the Elders & Priests like dogs
But Humble as a Lamb or Ass
Obeyd himself to Caiaphas
God wants not Man to Humble himself
This is the trick of the ancient Elf
This is the Race that Jesus ran
Humble to God Haughty to Man
Cursing the Rulers before the People
Even to the temples highest Steeple
And when he Humbled himself to God
Then descended the Cruel Rod
If thou humblest thyself thou humblest me
Thou also dwellst in Eternity
Thou art a Man God is no more
Thy own humanity learn to adore
For that is my Spirit of Life
Awake arise to Spiritual Strife
And thy Revenge abroad display
In terrors at the Last Judgment day
Gods Mercy & Long Suffering
Is but the Sinner to Judgment to bring
Thou on the Cross for them shalt pray
And take Revenge at the Last Day
Jesus replied & thunders hurld

I never will Pray for the World
Once [I] did so when I prayd ill the Garden
I wishd to take with me a Bodily Pardon
Can that which was of Woman born
In the absence of the Morn
When the Soul fell into Sleep
And Archangels round it weep
Shooting out against the Light
Fibres of a deadly night
Reasoning upon its own Dark Fiction
In Doubt which is Self Contradiction
Humility is only Doubt
And does the Sun & Moon blot out
Rooting over with thorns & stems
The buried Soul & all its Gems
This Lifes dim Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see with not thro the Eye
That was born in a night to perish in a night
When the Soul slept in the beams of Light.

Was Jesus Chaste or did he
Give any Lessons of Chastity?
The morning blusht fiery red
Mary was found in Adulterous bed
Earth groand beneath & Heaven above
Trembled at discovery of Love
Jesus was sitting in Moses Chair
They brought the trembling Woman There
Moses commands she be stoned to Death
What was the sound of Jesus breath
He laid his hand on Moses Law

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The Ancient Heavens in Silent Awe
Writ with Curses from Pole to Pole
All away began to roll
The Earth trembling & Naked lay
In secret bed of Mortal Clay
On Sinai felt the hand Divine
Putting back the bloody shrine
And she heard the breath of God
As she heard by Edens flood
Good & Evil are no more
Sinai's trumpets cease to roar
Cease finger of God to Write
The Heavens are not clean in thy Sight
Thou art Good & thou Alone
Nor may the sinner cast one stone
To be Good only is to be
A Devil or else a Pharisee
Thou Angel of the Presence Divine
That didst create this Body of Mine
Wherefore has[t] thou writ these Laws
And Created Hells dark jaws
My Presence I will take from thee
A Cold Leper thou shalt be
Tho thou wast so pure & bright
That Heaven was Impure in thy Sight
Tho thy Oath turnd Heaven Pale
Tho thy Covenant built Hells Jail
Tho thou didst all to Chaos roll
With the Serpent for its soul
Still the breath Divine does move
And the breath Divine is Love
Mary Fear Not Let me see

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The Seven Devils that torment thee
Hide not from my Sight thy Sin
That forgiveness thou maist win
Has no Man Condemned thee
No Man Lord! then what is he
Who shall Accuse thee. Come Ye forth
Fallen Fiends of Heavnlly birth
That have forgot your Ancient love
And driven away my trembling Dove
You shall bow before her feet
You shall lick the dust for Meat
And tho you cannot Love but Hate
Shall be beggars at Loves Gate
What was thy love Let me see it
Was it love or Dark Deceit
Love too long from Me has fled.
Twas dark deceit to Earn my bread
Twas Covet or twas Custom or
Some trifle not worth caring for
That they may call a shame & Sin
Loves Temple that God dwelleth in
And hide in secret hidden Shrine
The Naked Human form divine
And render that a Lawless thing
On which the Soul Expands its wing
But this O Lord this was my Sin
When first I let these Devils in
In dark pretence to Chastity
Blaspheming Love blaspheming thee
Thence Rose Secret Adulteries
And thence did Covet also rise
My Sin thou hast forgiven me
Canst thou forgive my Blasphemy

Canst thou return to this dark Hell
And in my burning bosom dwell
And canst thou Die that I may live
And canst thou Pity & forgive
Then Rolld the shadowy Man away
From the Limbs of Jesus to make them his prey
An Ever devo[u]ring appetite
Glittering with festering Venoms bright
Crying Crucify this cause of distress
Who dont keep the secrets of Holiness
All Mental Powers by Diseases we bind
But he heals the Deaf & the Dumb & the Blind
Whom God has afflicted for Secret Ends

He comforts & Heals & calls them Friends
But when Jesus was Crucified
Then was perfected his glittering pride
In three Nights he devourd his prey
And still he devours the Body of Clay
For Dust & Clay is the Serpents meat
Which never was made for Man to Eat

Was Jesus gentle or did he
Give any marks of Gentility
When twelve years old he ran away
And left his Parents in dismay
When after three days sorrow found
Loud as Sinai's trumpet sound
No Earthly Parents I confess
My Heavenly Fathers business
Ye understand not what I say
And angry force me to obey

Obedience is a duty then
And favour gains with God & Men
John from the Wilderness loud cried
Satan gloried in his Pride
Come said Satan come away
Ill soon see if youll obey
John for disobedience bled
But you can turn the stones to bread
Gods high king & Gods high Priest
Shall Plant their Glories in your breast
If Caiaphas you will obey
If Herod you with bloody Prey
Feed with the Sacrifice & be
Obedient fall down worship me
Thunders & lightnings broke around
And Jesus voice in thunders sound
Thus I sieze the Spiritual Prey
Ye smiters with disease make way
I come Your King & God to sieze
Is God a Smiter with disease
The God of this World raged in vain
He bound Old Satan in his Chain
And bursting forth his furious ire
Became a Chariot of fire
Throughout the land he took his course
And traced Diseases to their Source
He cursd the Scribe & Pharisee

Trampling down Hipocrisy
Where eer his Chariot took its way
There Gates of Death let in the Day
Broke down from every Chain & Bar
And Satan in his Spiritual War

Dragd at his Chariot wheels loud howld
The God of this World louder rolld
The Chariot Wheels & louder still
His voice was heard from Zions hill
And in his hand the Scourge shone bright
He scourgd the Merchant Canaanite
From out the Temple of his Mind
And in his Body tight does bind
Satan & all his Hellish Crew
And thus with wrath he did subdue
The Serpent Bulk of Natures dross
Till he had naild it to the Cross
He took on Sin in the Virgins Womb
And put it off on the Cross & Tomb
To be Worshipd by the Church of Rome
The Vision of Christ that thou dost see
Is my Visions Greatest Enemy
Thine has a great hook nose like thine
Mine has a snub nose like to mine
Thine is the Friend of All Mankind
Mine speaks in parables to the Blind
Thine loves the same world that mine hates
Thy Heaven doors are my Hell Gates
Socrates taught what Melitus
Loathd as a Nations bitterest Curse
And Caiphas was in his own Mind
A benefactor of Mankind
Both read the Bible day & night
But thou readst black where I read white

I am sure This Jesus will not do
Either for Englishman or Jew

An Epitaph

Here lies John Trot the Friend of all mankind
He has not left one Enemy behind
Friends were quite hard to find old authors say
But now they stand in every bodies way

He is a Cock would
And would be a Cock if he could

And his legs carried it like a long fork
Reachd all the way from Chichester to York
From York all across Scotland to the Sea
This was a Man of Men as seems to me
Not only in his Mouth his own Soul lay
But my Soul also would he bear away
Like as a Pedlar bears his weary Pack
So Stewhards Soul he buckld to his Back
But once alas committing a Mistake
He bore the wr[et]ched Soul of William Blake
That he might turn it into Eggs of Gold
But neither Back nor mouth those Eggs could hold
His underjaw dropd as those Eggs he laid
And Stewhards Eggs are addled & decayd

The Examiner whose very name is Hunt
Calld Death a Madman trembling for the affront
Like trembling Hare sits on his weakly paper
On which he usd to dance & sport & caper
Yorkshire Jack Hemp & gentle blushing Daw
Clapd Death into the corner of their jaw
And Felpham Billy rode out every morn
Horseback with Death over the fields of corn
Who with iron hand cuffd in the afternoon

The Ears of Billys Lawyer & Dragoon
And Cur my Lawyer & Dady Jack Hemps Parson
Both went to Law with Death to keep our Ears on
For how to starve Death we had laid a plot
Against his Price but Death was in the Pot
He made them pay his Price alack a day
He knew both Law & Gospel better than they
O that I neer ha[d] seen that William Blake
Or could from death Assassinetti wake
We thought Alas that such a thought should be
That Blake would Etch for him & draw for me
For twas a kind of Bargain Screwmuch made
That Blakes Designs should be by us displayed
Because he makes designs so very cheap
Then Screwmuch at Blakes soul took a long leap
Twas not a Mouse twas Death in a disguise
And I alas live to weep out mine Eyes
And Death sits laughing on their Monuments
On which hes written Recievd the Contents
But I have writ so sorrowful my thought is
His Epitaph for my tears are aquafortis

Come Artists knock your heads against This stone
For Sorrow that our friend Bob Screwmuchs gone
And now the Men upon me smile & Laugh
Ill also write my own dear Epitaph
And Ill be buried near a Dike
That my friends may weep as much as they like
Here lies Steward the Friend of All &c

Was I angry with Hayley who usd me so in
Or can I be angry with Felphams old Mill
Or angry with Flaxman or Cromek or Stothard

Ancient of Days

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Or poor Schiavonetti whom they to death botherd
Or angry with Macklin or Boydel or Bowyer
Because they did not say O what a Beau ye are
At a Friends Errors Anger shew
Mirth at the Errors of a Foe

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AUTHOR FACTS

William Blake was born on Nov. 28, 1757, in London. His father ran a hosiery shop. William, the third of five children, went to school only long enough to learn to read and write, and then he worked in the shop until he was 14. When he saw the boy's talent for drawing, Blake's father apprenticed him to an engraver.

At 25 Blake married Catherine Boucher. He taught her to read and write and to help him in his work. They had no children. They worked together to produce an edition of Blake's poems and drawings, called *Songs of Innocence*. Blake engraved both words and pictures on copper printing plates. Catherine made the printing impressions, hand-coloured the pictures, and bound the books. The books sold slowly, for a few shillings each.

Blake's fame as an artist and engraver rests largely on a set of 21 copperplate etchings to illustrate the *Book of Job* in the *Old Testament*. However, he did much work for which other artists and engravers got the credit.

Blake was a poor businessman. A true artist he let his own passionate beliefs about religion and life dictate what he worked with rather than the market requirements of his day. Blake was one of the first [Romantics](#) blazing a trail which was soon to be followed by some of the most stellar names in innovative Victorian poetry.

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The Romantics

Get ready to show off. A quick read of this section and you'd be able to sound like an Oxford don. Use your knowledge at dinner parties, blind your dates with wit (not if it's past the midnight hour and you're in a disco), sound smarter than your best friends effortlessly (it's time you tested that friendship anyway) and show that in the 21st century knowledge comes easy to those who know how to use technology.

Romantics was a term applied to the proponents of a movement in European literature and arts that was both gentle and subversive. Romanticism began as a reaction to Neo-Classicism at the beginning of the 18th century and Blake was a firm, if unofficial believer. Intuitive rather than considerate in approach his work laid the foundations which Dante and Christina Rossetti were to pick up on for the pre-Raphaelite movement.

The gradual and, at times, paradoxical rise of Romanticism makes it difficult to define. Broadly speaking it emphasised the use of imagination and emotion over reason and intellect and involves the following characteristics: individualism, nature-worship, primitivism, an interest in medieval, Oriental and vanished cultures in general, religious mysticism, free thought, exaltation of physical passion, revolt against convention and a persistent attraction to the supernatural.

Officially, Romanticism was arrested in its development in England in 1832 and evolved into the next stage in 1848 when seven men in England joined together to form an aesthetic movement which they called the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The Pre-Raphaelite movement was intended to redefine art.

The seven original members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were:
Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)

William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919; art critic and D.G.'s brother)

James Collinson (1825-81; painter; for a while fiancé of Christina Rossetti, D.G.'s sister)

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910; painter)

John Everett Millais (1829-96; painter)

Thomas Woolner (1825-92; a sculptor)

Frederic George Stephens (1828-1907; art critic)

Friends and associates of the original seven Pre-Raphaelites soon became part of the movement. Today we think of the Pre-Raphaelites as including not only William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and the rakish painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, but also his drug addicted painter wife Lizzie Siddal, the wildly original and intellectually honest designer William Morris, the sexually repressed writer and philosopher John Ruskin, acclaimed artist Edward Burne-Jones as well as Ford Madox Brown. The pre-Raphaelites were joined, rather enthusiastically, by Algernon Charles Swinburne whose actions often gave justified fuel to those who criticised the Pre-Raphaelites for being morally ambiguous, too much "of the flesh school of poetry."

The Pre-Raphaelite movement is an extension of the Romantic movement, but with one major difference: the Pre-Raphaelites rejected the Romantic's Dionysian side (embodied by Lord Byron). The Northern European Romantic influence though is clear, especially in the works of William Morris.

Yet while they called themselves Pre-Raphaelite, loudly stating their disdain for the fluff of the middle and high Renaissance, they were in one sense more like the Renaissance artists than the Romantics (who, like the Pre-Raphaelites, preferred the more natural Medievalism to the

constraints of the Protestant Reformation).

To a degree, the Pre-Raphaelites embraced their current Christian culture. They used Biblical images, as well as images from classical mythology, but not in the same way as the artists of the Renaissance. The Pre-Raphaelites were attempting to show the events with a more realistic or even symbolic eye, not a morally judgmental eye.

Aesthetic rather than religious, they were sometimes accused of being morally aloof.

Blake on the web

Immerse yourself in some top-notch art and some cool websites about the visionary poet.

1. <http://cla.calpoly.edu/%7Esmarx/Blake/blakeproject.html> - despite the funny web address this is the home of the Blake multi-media project. Well worth a look at for all Blake fans.
2. <http://www.english.uga.edu/~wblake/home1.html> - The Blake Digital Text project makes the entire works of Blake freely available. Not formatted in any way that you see here and without references and hyperlinks but then again...it is free.
3. http://www.levity.com/alchemy/blake_ma.html - *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, complete with plates. This is a brave attempt to bring the work to the web by the Alchemy Web.
4. <http://www.gailgastfield.com/Blake.html> - an enthusiast's site of Blake provides exactly the reasons why he's so loved today.
5. The following website provides detail of some Blake art with images changing every few months:
http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/detail/Detail_blake_william.html
6. More Blake images, this one his 1795 print of Nebuchadnezzar:
http://www.artsmia.org/world-myths/viewwallart/nebuchad_keyideas.html
7. The British Museum site of Blake, as expected, has an extensive visual display of his work online. Click [here](#) to get there.

Bluffer's Guide to Romanticism

Go on, admit it. The comic books, the booze the late-night films at the multiplex and the red-eyed nights spent on the web. Aren't you glad an expensive education has not gone entirely to waste? Which is exactly why we've put together a ten-point guide to Romanticism designed to make you the envy of your peers.

1. The father of romanticism is considered to be the French writer, Rousseau.
2. The first manifestation of Romanticism as an organised movement appeared in Germany in the works of Schiller, Goethe, Novalis and Kleist.
3. The idealist philosophers Kant, Hegel, Schelling and Fichte were also Romanticists.
4. Burns, along with Blake, Chatterton and Collins were English forerunners of the Romantic movement and the Gothic novel.
5. Percy's *Reliques* and Macpherson's *Ossian* kick-started the movement which was given further impetus by the French Revolution.
6. English Romanticism flowered between 1789 and 1832 in the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron Keats, Scott, Bedow, Hood and Moore.
7. In France, after Rousseau, the forerunners of Romanticism were Mme de Stael and Chateaubriand but there was no definite movement, as such, there until 1820. It did last however until 1843.
8. The chief influences in French Romanticism were German and English.

9. In the US romanticism started later and was less well defined than in Europe. Modified by the nature of the American culture of its time it placed great emphasis on humanitarianism and reform.

10. Amongst the American Romanticists are Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, Longfellow and Whitman.

Is this the end?

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