

Poems of William Blake eBook

Poems of William Blake by William Blake

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INTRODUCTION

Hear the voice of the Bard,
Who present, past, and future, sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walked among the ancient tree;

Calling the lapsed soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might control
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

“O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass!
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumbrous mass.

“Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor,
The watery shore,
Are given thee till the break of day.”

Earth's answer

Earth raised up her head
From the darkness dread and drear,
Her light fled,
Stony, dread,
And her locks covered with grey despair.

“Prisoned on watery shore,
Starry jealousy does keep my den
Cold and hoar;
Weeping o'er,
I hear the father of the ancient men.

“Selfish father of men!
Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!
Can delight,



Chained in night,
The virgins of youth and morning bear?

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

“Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around!
Selfish, vain,
Eternal bane,
That free love with bondage bound.”

The clod and the pebble

“Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives it ease,
And builds a heaven in hell's despair.”

So sang a little clod of clay,
Trodden with the cattle's feet,
But a pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet:

“Love seeketh only Self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a hell in heaven's despite.”

Holy Thursday

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

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

And their sun does never shine,
And their fields are bleak and bare,
And their ways are filled with thorns:
It is eternal winter there.



For where'er the sun does shine,
And where'er the rain does fall,
Babes should never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

The little girl lost

In futurity
I prophetic see
That the earth from sleep
(Grave the sentence deep)

Shall arise, and seek for her Maker meek; And the desert wild Become a garden mild.

In the southern clime,
Where the summer's prime
Never fades away,
Lovely Lyca lay.



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Seven summers old
Lovely Lyca told.
She had wandered long,
Hearing wild birds' song.

“Sweet sleep, come to me
Underneath this tree;
Do father, mother, weep?
Where can Lyca sleep?”

“Lost in desert wild
Is your little child.
How can Lyca sleep
If her mother weep?”

“If her heart does ache,
Then let Lyca wake;
If my mother sleep,
Lyca shall not weep.”

“Frowning, frowning night,
O'er this desert bright
Let thy moon arise,
While I close my eyes.”

Sleeping Lyca lay
While the beasts of prey,
Come from caverns deep,
Viewed the maid asleep.

The kingly lion stood,
And the virgin viewed:
Then he gambolled round
O'er the hallowed ground.

Leopards, tigers, play
Round her as she lay;
While the lion old
Bowed his mane of gold,

And her breast did lick
And upon her neck,
From his eyes of flame,
Ruby tears there came;



While the lioness
Loosed her slender dress,
And naked they conveyed
To caves the sleeping maid.

The little girl found

All the night in woe
Lyca's parents go
Over valleys deep,
While the deserts weep.

Tired and woe-begone,
Hoarse with making moan,
Arm in arm, seven days
They traced the desert ways.

Seven nights they sleep
Among shadows deep,
And dream they see their child
Starved in desert wild.

Pale through pathless ways
The fancied image strays,
Famished, weeping, weak,
With hollow piteous shriek.

Rising from unrest,
The trembling woman pressed
With feet of weary woe;
She could no further go.

In his arms he bore
Her, armed with sorrow sore;
Till before their way
A couching lion lay.

Turning back was vain:
Soon his heavy mane
Bore them to the ground,
Then he stalked around,

Smelling to his prey;
But their fears allay
When he licks their hands,
And silent by them stands.



They look upon his eyes,
Filled with deep surprise;
And wondering behold
A spirit armed in gold.

On his head a crown,
On his shoulders down
Flowed his golden hair.
Gone was all their care.

“Follow me,” he said;
“Weep not for the maid;
In my palace deep,
Lyca lies asleep.”

Then they followed
Where the vision led,
And saw their sleeping child
Among tigers wild.

To this day they dwell
In a lonely dell,
Nor fear the wolvish howl
Nor the lion’s growl.

The chimney sweeper

A little black thing in the snow,
Crying “weep! weep!” in notes of woe!
“Where are thy father and mother? Say!”—
“They are both gone up to the church to pray.



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“Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smiled among the winter’s snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

“And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God and his priest and king,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.”

Nurse’s song

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

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

The sick rose

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

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

The fly

Little Fly,
Thy summer’s play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?



For I dance
And drink, and sing,
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life
And strength and breath
And the want
Of thought is death;

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

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 beguiled!

And I wept both night and day,
And he wiped my tears away;
And I wept both day and night,
And hid from him my heart's delight.

So he took his wings, and fled;
Then the morn blushed rosy red.
I dried my tears, and armed my fears
With ten-thousand shields and spears.

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

The tiger

Tiger, tiger, 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 seize the fire?



And what shoulder and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And, when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand and 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 watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?



Page 4

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

My pretty rose tree

A flower was offered to me,
Such a flower as May never bore;
But I said "I've a pretty rose tree,"
And I passed the sweet flower o'er.

Then I went to my pretty rose tree,
To tend her by day and by night;
But my rose turned away with jealousy,
And her thorns were my only delight.

Ah Sunflower

Ah Sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun;
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done;

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves, and aspire
Where my Sunflower wishes to go!

The lily

The modest Rose puts forth a thorn,
The humble sheep a threat'ning horn:
While the Lily white shall in love delight,
Nor a thorn nor a threat stain her beauty bright.

The garden of love

I laid me down upon a bank,
Where Love lay sleeping;
I heard among the rushes dank
Weeping, weeping.

Then I went to the heath and the wild,
To the thistles and thorns of the waste;



And they told me how they were beguiled,
Driven out, and compelled to the chaste.

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 turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

The little vagabond

Dear mother, dear mother, the Church is cold;
But the Alehouse is healthy, and pleasant, and warm.
Besides, I can tell where I am used well;
The poor parsons with wind like a blown bladder swell.

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 livelong day,
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray.

Then the Parson might preach, and drink, and 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, and give him both drink and apparel.

London

I wandered through each chartered street,

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Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
A mark in every face I meet,
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackening church appalls,
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace-walls.

But most, through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the marriage-hearse.

The human abstract

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

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

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

Soon spreads the dismal shade
Of Mystery over his head,
And the caterpillar and fly
Feed on the Mystery.



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

The gods of the earth and sea
Sought through nature to find this tree,
But their search was all in vain:
There grows one in the human Brain.

Infant sorrow

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

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

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 watered it in fears
Night and 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 veiled the pole;
In the morning, glad, I see
My foe outstretched 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 seized his hair,
He led him by his little coat,
And all admired the priestly care.



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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 stripped him to his little shirt,
And bound him in an iron chain,

And burned him in a holy place
Where many had been burned before;
The weeping parents wept in vain.
Are such thing done on Albion's shore?

A little girl lost

Children of the future age,
Reading this indignant page,
Know that in a former time
Love, sweet love, was thought a crime.

In the age of gold,
Free from winter's cold,
Youth and maiden bright,
To the holy light,
Naked in the sunny beams delight.

Once a youthful pair,
Filled with softest care,
Met in garden bright
Where the holy light
Had just removed the curtains of the night.

Then, in rising day,
On the grass they play;
Parents were afar,
Strangers came not near,
And the maiden soon forgot her fear.

Tired with kisses sweet,
They agree to meet
When the silent sleep



Waves o'er heaven's deep,
And the weary tired wanderers weep.

To her father white
Came the maiden bright;
But his loving look,
Like the holy book
All her tender limbs with terror shook.

“Ona, pale and weak,
To thy father speak!
Oh the trembling fear!
Oh the dismal care
That shakes the blossoms of my hoary hair!”

The schoolboy

I love to rise on a summer morn,
When birds are singing on every tree;
The distant huntsman winds his horn,
And the skylark sings with me:
Oh what sweet company!

But to go to school in a summer morn, —
Oh it drives all joy away!
Under a cruel eye outworn,
The little ones spend the day
In sighing and dismay.

Ah then at times I drooping sit,
And spend many an anxious hour;
Nor in my book can I take delight,
Nor sit in learning's bower,
Worn through with the dreary shower.

How can the bird that is born for joy
Sit in a cage and sing?
How can a child, when fears annoy,
But droop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful spring?

Oh father and mother, if buds are nipped,
And blossoms blown away;
And if the tender plants are stripped
Of their joy in the springing day,
By sorrow and care's dismay, —



How shall the summer arise in joy,
Or the summer fruits appear?
Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,
Or bless the mellowing year,
When the blasts of winter appear?

To Tirzah

Whate'er is born of mortal birth
Must be consumed with the earth,
To rise from generation free:
Then what have I to do with thee?
The sexes sprang from shame and pride,
Blown in the morn, in evening died;
But mercy changed death into sleep;
The sexes rose to work and weep.



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Thou, mother of my mortal part,
With cruelty didst mould my heart,
And with false self-deceiving tears
Didst bind my nostrils, eyes, and ears,

Didst close my tongue in senseless clay,
And me to mortal life betray.
The death of Jesus set me free:
Then what have I to do with thee?

The voice of the ancient Bard

Youth of delight! come hither
And see the opening morn,
Image of Truth new-born.
Doubt is fled, and clouds of reason,
Dark disputes and artful teasing.
Folly is an endless maze;
Tangled roots perplex her ways;
How many have fallen there!
They stumble all night over bones of the dead;
And feel — they know not what but care;
And wish to lead others, when they should be led.

APPENDIX

A divine image

Cruelty has a human heart,
And Jealousy a human face;
Terror the human form divine,
And Secresy the human dress.

The human dress is forged iron,
The human form a fiery forge,
The human face a furnace sealed,
The human heart its hungry gorge.

Note: Though written and engraved by Blake, “A *divine image*” was never included in the *songs of innocence and of experience*.

William Blake's

The book of Thel



THEL'S Motto

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

THE BOOK of THEL

The Author & Printer Willm. Blake. 1780

THEL

I

The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks,
All but the youngest: she in paleness sought the secret air.
To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day:
Down by the river of Adona her soft voice is heard;
And thus her gentle lamentation falls like morning dew.

O life of this our spring! why fades the lotus of the water?
Why fade these children of the spring? born but to smile & fall.
Ah! Thel is like a watry bow, and like a parting cloud,
Like a reflection in a glass: like shadows in the water
Like dreams of infants, like a smile upon an infants face.
Like the doves voice, like transient day, like music in the air:
Ah! gentle may I lay me down and gentle rest my head.
And gentle sleep the sleep of death, and gently hear the voice
Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time.



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The Lilly of the valley breathing in the humble grass
Answerd the lovely maid and said: I am a watry weed,
And I am very small and love to dwell in lowly vales:
So weak the gilded butterfly scarce perches on my head
Yet I am visited from heaven and he that smiles on all
Walks in the valley, and each morn over me spreads his hand
Saying, rejoice thou humble grass, thou new-born lily flower.
Thou gentle maid of silent valleys and of modest brooks:
For thou shall be clothed in light, and fed with morning manna:
Till summers heat melts thee beside the fountains and the springs
To flourish in eternal vales: they why should Thel complain.
Why should the mistress of the vales of Har, utter a sigh.

She ceasd & smild in tears, then sat down in her silver shrine.

Thel answerd, O thou little virgin of the peaceful valley.
Giving to those that cannot crave, the voiceless, the o'er tired
The breath doth nourish the innocent lamb, he smells the milky garments
He crops thy flowers while thou sittest smiling in his face,
Wiping his mild and meekin mouth from all contagious taints.
Thy wine doth purify the golden honey; thy perfume.
Which thou dost scatter on every little blade of grass that springs
Revives the milked cow, & tames the fire-breathing steed.
But Thel is like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun:
I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place.

Queen of the vales the Lily answered, ask the tender cloud,
And it shall tell thee why it glitters in the morning sky.
And why it scatters its bright beauty thro the humid air.
Descend O little cloud & hover before the eyes of Thel.

The Cloud descended and the Lily bowd her modest head:
And went to mind her numerous charge among the verdant grass.

II.

O little Cloud the virgin said, I charge thee to tell me
Why thou complainest now when in one hour thou fade away:
Then we shall seek thee but not find: ah Thel is like to thee.
I pass away, yet I complain, and no one hears my voice.

The Cloud then shewd his golden head & his bright form emerg'd.
Hovering and glittering on the air before the face of Thel.



O virgin know'st thou not our steeds drink of the golden springs
Where Luvah doth renew his horses: lookst thou on my youth.
And fearest thou because I vanish and am seen no more.
Nothing remains; O maid I tell thee, when I pass away.
It is to tenfold life, to love, to peace, and raptures holy:
Unseen descending, weigh my light wings upon balmy flowers:
And court the fair eyed dew, to take me to her shining tent
The weeping virgin, trembling kneels before the risen sun.
Till we arise link'd in a golden band and never part:
But walk united bearing food to all our tender flowers.



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Dost thou O little cloud? I fear that I am not like thee:
For I walk through the vales of Har, and smell the sweetest flowers:
But I feed not the little flowers: I hear the warbling birds,
But I feed not the warbling birds, they fly and seek their food:
But Thel delights in these no more because I fade away
And all shall say, without a use this shining women liv'd,
Or did she only live to be at death the food of worms.

The Cloud reclind upon his airy throne and answerd thus.

Then if thou art the food of worms, O virgin of the skies,
How great thy use, how great thy blessing, every thing that lives.
Lives not alone nor or itself: fear not and I will call,
The weak worm from its lowly bed, and thou shalt hear its voice.
Come forth worm and the silent valley, to thy pensive queen.

The helpless worm arose and sat upon the Lillys leaf,
And the bright Cloud saild on, to find his partner in the vale.

III.

Then Thel astonish'd view'd the Worm upon its dewy bed.

Art thou a Worm? image of weakness. art thou but a Worm?
I see thee like an infant wrapped in the Lillys leaf;
Ah weep not little voice, thou can'st not speak, but thou can'st weep:
Is this a Worm? I see they lay helpless & naked: weeping
And none to answer, none to cherish thee with mothers smiles.

The Clod of Clay heard the Worms voice & rais'd her pitying head:
She bowd over the weeping infant, and her life exhald
In milky fondness, then on Thel she fix'd her humble eyes

O beauty of the vales of Har, we live not for ourselves,
Thou seest me the meanest thing, and so I am indeed:
My bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark,

But he that loves the lowly, pours his oil upon my head
And kisses me, and binds his nuptial bands around my breast.
And says; Thou mother of my children, I have loved thee
And I have given thee a crown that none can take away.
But how this is sweet maid, I know not, and I cannot know
I ponder, and I cannot ponder; yet I live and love.



The daughter of beauty wip'd her pitying tears with her white veil,
And said, Alas! I knew not this, and therefore did I weep:
That God would love a Worm I knew, and punish the evil foot
That wilful bruis'd its helpless form: but that he cherish'd it
With milk and oil I never knew, and therefore did I weep,
And I complain'd in the mild air, because I fade away.
And lay me down in thy cold bed, and leave my shining lot.

Queen of the vales, the matron Clay answered: I heard thy sighs.
And all thy moans flew o'er my roof, but I have call'd them down:
Wilt thou O Queen enter my house, tis given thee to enter,
And to return: fear nothing, enter with thy virgin feet.

IV.



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The eternal gates terrific porter lifted the northern bar:
Thel enter'd in & saw the secrets of the land unknown;
She saw the couches of the dead, & where the fibrous roots
Of every heart on earth infixes deep its restless twists:
A land of sorrows & of tears where never smile was seen.

She wandered in the land of clouds thro' valleys dark, listning
Dolors & lamentations: waiting oft beside the dewy grave
She stood in silence, listning to the voices of the ground,
Till to her own grave plot she came, & there she sat down.
And heard this voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit.

Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
Or the glistening Eye to the poison of a smile!
Why are Eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn,
Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie!
Or an Eye of gifts & graces showring fruits & coined gold!

Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?
Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror trembling & affright
Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?
Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?

The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek,
Fled back unhinderd till she came into the vales of Har