



The Complete Poetry and Prose

William Blake, David V. Erdman (editor), Harold Bloom (Commentary)

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Since its first publication in 1965, this edition has been widely hailed as the best available text of Blake's poetry and prose. Now revised, it includes up-to-date work on variants, chronology of the poems, and critical commentary by Harold Bloom. An "Approved Edition" of the Center for Scholarly Editions of the Modern Language Association.

The Complete Poetry and Prose Details

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From Reader Review The Complete Poetry and Prose for online ebook

Patrick Gibson says

Blake was a printer and published his own poems—many illustrated. In fact scholars debate which pantheon to place him: artist or poet. Because of the labor intensive and time consuming manner in which type was set by hand, Blake's poetry is extremely economic. It is this conservation of words expressing such an abundance of ideas that makes his writing profoundly simple. That combined with the fact he had visions and was probably insane makes for great poetry.

"Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word,
That walk'd among the ancient trees.

Calling the lapsed Soul
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might controll.
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
Is given thee till the break of day."

Tony Iantosca says

Right, that one.

Alex Obrigewitsch says

Truly a paragon of artists and the arts.
A master, a mystic, a teacher and a tempest.

"Energy is eternal delight."

Hussam Elkhattib says

William Blake is one of the greatest poets of the English language. I'd recommend this book to anyone interested in the mysteries of life. A great concept that William Blake shared was how the individual ought to draw his or hers own conclusions and find their personalized ways, otherwise, they'll become a slave to someone else's thoughts the rest of their lives. Very well worth the read. Furthermore, anyone who's interested in republicanism and democracy should put this great book on their shelf. I thoroughly enjoyed both the poetry and prose in it. Highly recommended.

Jade says

Blake was one of the first poets I ever read and have come across time and time again and is also one of the only poets I've ever studied whose works I've thoroughly enjoyed reading. Thought provoking and full of interesting discourses - a sobering but refreshing step back from the typical 18th Century Gothic or Austen novel.

Shon says

Absolutely the greatest book I have ever read. Blake's poetry and prose are unmatched, whether he's invoking life and nature, questioning religion (especially fundamentalism), or calling a fundamentalist reverend on his hypocrisy, this book has it all.

I will never remove this book from my collection, and I'm still waiting to see if anything knocks it off #1 on my all-time favorites list.

Dan says

(Review edited July 2016)

While frequently described as "pre-Romantic," Blake wrote on many themes typically associated with Romanticism, including nature, imagination and the experiences of childhood. One significant way in which Blake differs from the Romantic poets, however, is in his use of myth. While poets like Keats or Shelley might make reference to a recognized character from classical myth (even basing a longer work on such a character, as in the case of Shelley's verse drama *Prometheus Unbound*), Blake's mythical references are to such obscure beings as Urizen, Luvah and Tharmas, and to mysterious entities such as spectres and emanations. These characters are not from any earlier mythic tradition, but were invented by Blake in his major "prophetic" works, including *The Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. In the context of his constructing an original mythology, I think my favorite quote by Blake has to be "I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Mans; I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create." As a mythopoeic artist, if Blake is to be compared to anyone, perhaps it should be to writers like J.R. Tolkien or H P Lovecraft.

(For me, Blake's major prophetic works rank up there along with Finnegans Wake with regard to the amount of intellectual effort one must make in order to make sense of what is going on at any point in the work. I have found Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* useful in its commentary on the general outlines of Blake's mythological system).

Along with the major and minor prophecies are included Blake's earlier and less daunting works such as *Songs of Innocence And of Experience* (but while these lyrical poems are much more accessible, they, too, have their ambiguities—on which latter I enjoy Harold Bloom's commentary, particularly in *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument*).

Other works like *An Island in the Moon* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* do not require familiarity with Blake's mythology. For its paradoxicality, and particularly for its "Proverbs of Hell," which reminds me other aphoristic writers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Heraclitus, *The Marriage* is a particular favorite of mine.

Kirk says

“The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”

[...] If the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

[autograph:] William Blake: one who is very much delighted with being in good company. Born 28 Nov 1757 in London & has died several times since.

“Auguries of Innocence”

[...]

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

[Letter to Mr. Butts, Felpham, August 16, 1803]

O, why was I born with a different face?
Why was I not born like the rest of my race?
When I look, each one starts; when I speak, I offend;
Then I'm silent & pensive, & I lose every Friend.

Then my verse I dishonour, My pictures despise;
My person degrade, & my temper chastise;
And the pen is my terror, the pencil my shame;
All my talents I bury, and dead is my Fame.

I am either too low, or too highly priz'd;

When Elate I'm Envy'd, When Meek I'm despis'd.

Chad Gibbons says

William Blake has got to be my favorite poet. Read 'Songs of Innocence' to your kids and read 'Songs of Experience' for yourself.

This guy was a genius. And he was probably insane.

Alins says

How is it possible that Blake was able to articulate the full enormity of his vision while keeping up with the complex mythological narrative he invented? Through much of his longer poetical works he so effortlessly associates his mammoth cosmic figures with a riveting and impassioned philosophical discourse. One wonders whether the man was even human. And yet it is precisely this disbelief he and, a bit later and with more severity, Nietzsche preached against.

For Blake, the human imagination is the gateway to eternity, and anyone is capable of it. Yet even this vote of confidence in man falls short of Nietzsche's often misunderstood optimism when he asserts that artistic achievement has nothing to do with the "muse" and is wholly within the boundaries of human ability. For Nietzsche, man alone responsible for his great works, and to credit anything else with their sublimity is to undermine human potential. But Blake, a man of profound faith, contends that "When I am commanded by the spirits, then I write; and the moment I have written, I see the words fly about the room in all directions." Yet how telling it is that even this humble explaining-away of his powers is fraught with poetry.

But whether or not Blake credited himself with his evident genius, the works speak for themselves. And for "The Complete Poetry and Prose," two of the most competent Blake scholars join forces to offer a clear, extensive and informed presentation of Blake's output. Astonishing in scope and scholarship, this Erdman/Bloom edition is as indispensable for Blake's work as it is for their notes and commentary. My only complaint is the inconsistency of Bloom's commentary. He skips entire sections of Blake's worth here, whereas he covers every last word of it in his own book, "Blake's Apocalypse." Hmm . . . Harold wouldn't, by any chance, be trying to get us to, um, SPEND a little more, you think? Naaahhh.

But no commentary -- no matter how illuminating -- will ever approach the radiance of Blake's own words. From the plainspoken awe of the early masterpieces, "Ahania" and "The Book of Thel," to the astonishing epics "The Four Zoas" and "Jerusalem" and right down to "The Mental Traveler," that late fruition of Blake's bitingly ironical voice, "The Complete Poems and Prose" reads like a Bible in its own right. Routinely taking on such lofty subjects as the fall of man, love and jealousy, desire and reason, good and evil, a reading of Blake's work all together yields just as much beauty, mystery and genius.

Equally as riveting are the many letters with which the primary portion of the book concludes. Rife with the fierce inquisitiveness and confidence that characterizes the famous "Proverbs of Hell," Blake's letters rank with those of Keats and Hopkins as some of the most stirring autobiographical sketches ever produced by a master poet.

Erdman's "Prophet Against Empire" and Bloom's aforementioned "Blake's Apocalypse" make for great companion pieces, as does Frye's "Fearful Symmetry." But I think the best way for new readers to take on Blake's work is by diving blindly into its initially cold waters, and only calling in Erdman, Bloom and Frye to turn up the heat later on.

Irene says

I will never be done with this book.

Carlos says

I reconnect on so many levels when I read Blake. Let me quote from the Song of Los:
Times rolled o'er all the sons of Har, time after time
Orc on Mount Atlas howld, chain'd down with the Chain of Jealousy
Then Oothon hovered over Judah & Jerusalem
And Jesus heard her voice (a man of sorrows) he received
A Gospel from wretched Theotormon."

All things change, decay, and are reborn. That is only a part of Blake's message.
Highly Recommended!

Andrew says

Ladies and gentlemen, make way for the BLOWOUT! scholarly edition of the man who kept me focused on the inherently fated and apocalyptic nature of modern life for a few weeks. I've been a fan ever since high school, and felt the need to clean house and read the complete works, including the really boring, ephemeral letters. With this, you get a complete picture of Blake's worldview, and the bizarre mythological systems he dreamt up to convey his vision of life in England around the turn of the 19th Century, dark Satanic mills and all.

Paul says

Happy to see that the editors reproduced all of Blake's marginal notations (in books that he owned), which are 100% amazing:

[On Bacon]

Good Advice for Satan's Kingdom

What Bacon calls Lies is Truth itself!

Trifling Nonsense

This is Folly Itself

Is this Great -- Is this Christian -- No

What a contemptible Fool is This Bacon

Surely the Man who wrote this letter never talked to any but coxcombs

The Great Bacon he is Call'd -- I call him the Little Bacon

God is not a Mathematical Diagram

[On Lavater]

This should be written in gold letters on our temples

Sweet.

O that men would seek immortal moments -- O that men would converse with God

knaveries are not human nature -- knaveries are knaveries -- this aphorism seems to me to want discrimination

Lies & Priestcraft -- Truth is Nature

Cursed Folly!

Contemptible Falsehood & Wickedness!

Serpentine Dissimulation!

[On a Dante scholar]

It appears to Me that Men are hired to Run down Men of Genius under the Mask of Translators

This Man was Hired to Depress Art

I do not believe this Anecdote

The difference bewteen a bad Artist & a good One Is the Bad Artist Seems to Copy a Great Deal: The Good

one Really Does Copy a Great Deal

The Man who never in his Mind & Thoughts travel'd to Heaven Is No Artist

There is no End to the Follies of this Man

Lisa says

William Blake became one of the most highly regarded writers and painters during his time--after his death. He was opinionated and luckily he was afforded the opportunity to express views that others were persecuted for expressing during that time in history. To fully understand his work, study his life and the societal norms of the day. Otherwise you can't fully appreciate the beauty of his ideas.

David says

I borrowed The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake through the Arrowhead interlibrary loan system, which serves northeast Minnesota. I must return it by Feb 4, 2013. Literally, it is a very heavy book in paperback. You could prop up an end of a bookshelf with it, or use it as a doorstop.

I like it so much, I may buy a copy. I knew Blake composed beautiful work. I knew little about how radical he was for his time. He created most of his work during the period from 1784 until his death in 1827. He challenges whatever you believe, whether traditional Christian or Humanist, and often writes his own opposing opinions back-to-back. He challenged the translations of Greek and Roman mythology, from Chaucer, Marlowe, and Milton. He has little good to say about the Church of England, or Rome. I thought he was a follower of Swedenborg, but he is an antagonist, and rewrites the doctrines.

The Commentary by Harold Bloom, 80 pages of it at the back of the book, is an interesting companion to the text. You do not have to read the book in sequence. At least read "The Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (the hymn to free love), and "The Book of Urizen", a creation story that never ends.

"Tell me what is day or night to one o'erflowd with woe?
Tell me what is a thought? & of what substance is it made?
Tell me what is joy? & in what garden do joys grow?
And in what river swim the sorrows? and upon what mountains
Wave shadows of discontent? and in what houses dwell the wretched
Drunken with woe forgotten, and shut up from cold despair.

Tell me where dwell the thoughts forgotten till thou call them forth
Tell me where dwell the joys of old! & where the ancient loves?
And when will they renew again & the night of oblivion past? ..." pp. 47-8

"I cry, Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain wind!" p. 50

Trey says

I haven't read ALL of it, but I've read most of the poetry and a few of the shorter prose pieces. I'm a fan of Blake's. His poetry is amazing.

James says

Erdman's edition of the complete poetry and prose is now the standard edition of Blake's complete works and is the edition referenced by the Blake concordance online (as well as being available online, but Bloom's commentary is not). It is superior editorially to Keynes's edition, but the organization of Keynes's edition always made more sense to me, being more strictly chronological. Furthermore, the Erdman edition heavily edits The Four Zoas to make it a coherent text, so I recommend direct study of the manuscript of FZ to those serious about it, making reference to Erdman's version of FZ as one reading of the poem rather than the poem itself.

Melusine Parry says

I absolutely adore William Blake. I am completely against any edition that has the poems without the illustrations (dunno about that one, picked it at random). It's literally a crime against the man's art to publish the text without the drawings.

ZaRi says

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.
