



The Ancient of Days by William Blake

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 Redbreast in a Cage

Puts all Heaven in a Rage.

A dove house fill'd with doves and pigeons

Shudders Hell thro' all its regions.

A Dog starv'd at his Master's Gate

Predicts the ruin of the State.

A Horse misus'd upon the Road

Calls to Heaven for Human blood.

Each outcry of the hunted Hare

A fibre from the Brain does tear.

He who shall train the Horse to War

Shall never pass the Polar Bar.

The Beggar's Dog and Widow's Cat,

Feed them and thou wilt grow fat.

The Gnat that sings his Summer song

Poison gets from Slander's tongue.

The poison of the Snake and Newt

Is the sweat of Envy's Foot.

A truth that's told with bad intent

Beats all the Lies you can invent.

It is right it should be so;

Man was made for Joy and Woe;

And when this we rightly know

Thro' the World we safely go.

Every Night and every Morn
Some to Misery are Born.
Every Morn and every Night
Some are Born to sweet delight.
Some are Born to sweet delight,
Some are Born to Endless Night.

William Blake
(1757-1827)

from Auguries of Innocence

Poet and visionary, artist and mystic, William Blake was seen by many of his contemporaries as mad. But Wordsworth said, “There is something in the madness of this man that interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron or Walter Scott.” Now he is recognised as one of the greatest figures of the Romantic movement. And his revolutionary words are sung in villages throughout England by members of the W. I.

This self-educated son of a London hosier saw angels in the trees in Peckham Rye and, in W. H. Auden’s words, “Spoke to Isaiah in the Strand / And heard inside each mortal thing / Its holy emanation sing.”

Trained as an engraver, he published small books of his poems and prose, illustrated with his hand-coloured prints, which combined poetry and images in experimental ways.

As the Industrial Revolution erupted around him, Blake celebrated the life of the imagination and of the human spirit. He fulminated against the mechanistic practices of his times, against the ‘dark satanic mills’ which incarcerated the working poor, and against the authoritarian figures who ruled their lives.

He was charged with High Treason for uttering seditious expressions such as “D-mn the King!”, but was acquitted. A passionate opponent of slavery, he believed in racial and sexual equality. He trained his wife Catherine as a printer, and she became an artist in her own right, and a partner in her husband’s work.

Even today – especially today? – Blake continues to speak to us in a prophetic and warning voice. His vision has not faded yet.



Self portrait by William Blake, 1802