

# WILLIAM BLAKE

*Evoking revolutionary content in his works, William Blake undermines traditional associations, disturbs the expected, rejects the conventions and destroys comfortable perceptions to force the reader to recreate order and meaning; to resist anything which clouds their imagination.*

*He questions the established values, discredits the status quo, and exposes hypocrisy*

## Biography

- Born 1757 in England
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> child of a moderately prosperous clothing maker
- Age 10, sent away for school for young artists
- Age 14, became an apprentice to an engraver
- 1779, became an engraver working for a radical dissenter and political thinker
  - ↳ He quickly joins the weekly circle of meetings with other radical thinkers
- 1780, he is involved in leading the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots
- 1782, he proposes to a girl but is rejected.
  - Shortly later, he meets Catherine (the illiterate and illegitimate daughter of a gardener). His father did not approve.
- 1803, arrested after a fight with a soldier. Acquitted.
- Blake had no real interest in making money, nor was he ever a comfortable man socially
- Lived in a time of revolution; his politics were radical
- Died 1827 in England

From a young age, claimed to have had religious visions. Some claimed he was insane

Psychotic???

Friends with Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin



William Blake's radicalism  
Review of the times in which he lived  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f10yBr124XM>  
(1 minutes)

## Philosophy (major ideas)

Imagination, unifying and infinite, supersedes reason (which is divisive and finite)

Imagination is the Devine Being in every person

Blake's ethics seek to liberate the instinctual self and to defeat reason  
↳ He saw Reason as the originator of morality and religion

Orthodox religion and deisms enslave humankind to a system that promises future rewards or punishments, a dogma that controls human minds

He believed there was an afterlife

Blake considered imagination an instrument of knowledge superior to reason.

↳ The word imagination means vision beyond materiality. God, the child and the poet share this power of vision (imagination).

↳ The role of the poet, according to Blake, is to see deeply into reality and to warn man of evils.

Blake is sometimes considered (along with Mary Wollstonecraft and her husband William Godwin) a forerunner of the 19th-century "free love" movement, a broad reform tradition starting in the 1820s that held that marriage is slavery, and advocated the removal of all state restrictions on sexual activity such as homosexuality, prostitution, and adultery.

A committed Christian who was hostile to the Church of England (indeed, to almost all forms of organized religion)

↳ Blake never supported the idea of praying in a public place, such as a church, together with others.

He felt very strongly about the way the Industrial Revolution was doing more harm than good and should be stopped.

↳ He didn't like the way children were used as workmen because of their size and the way they were discriminated against

