



WILLIAM BLAKE (1757-1827)

“I must create a system or be enslaved
by another man’s”—William Blake’s
Jerusalem

The Simple Life of Blake

- Worked as an engraver and professional artist, but was always very poor, especially later in life.
- His life is considered simple and boring.
- Claimed to see visions of angels, spirits, and ghosts of kings and queens.
- His work received little attention, and when it did, most found it (and him) weird, confusing, or even insane.

Blake = Early Romantic

- Romanticism: a movement that developed during the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a reaction against the Restoration and Enlightenment period's focus on logic and reason.
- In addition, Romantic poets like Blake reacted against the social, political, and spiritual abuses during their lifetimes.
- Romantics believe in the individual, imagination, and democracy, and often depict man alone, contemplating nature, working out his own destinies.

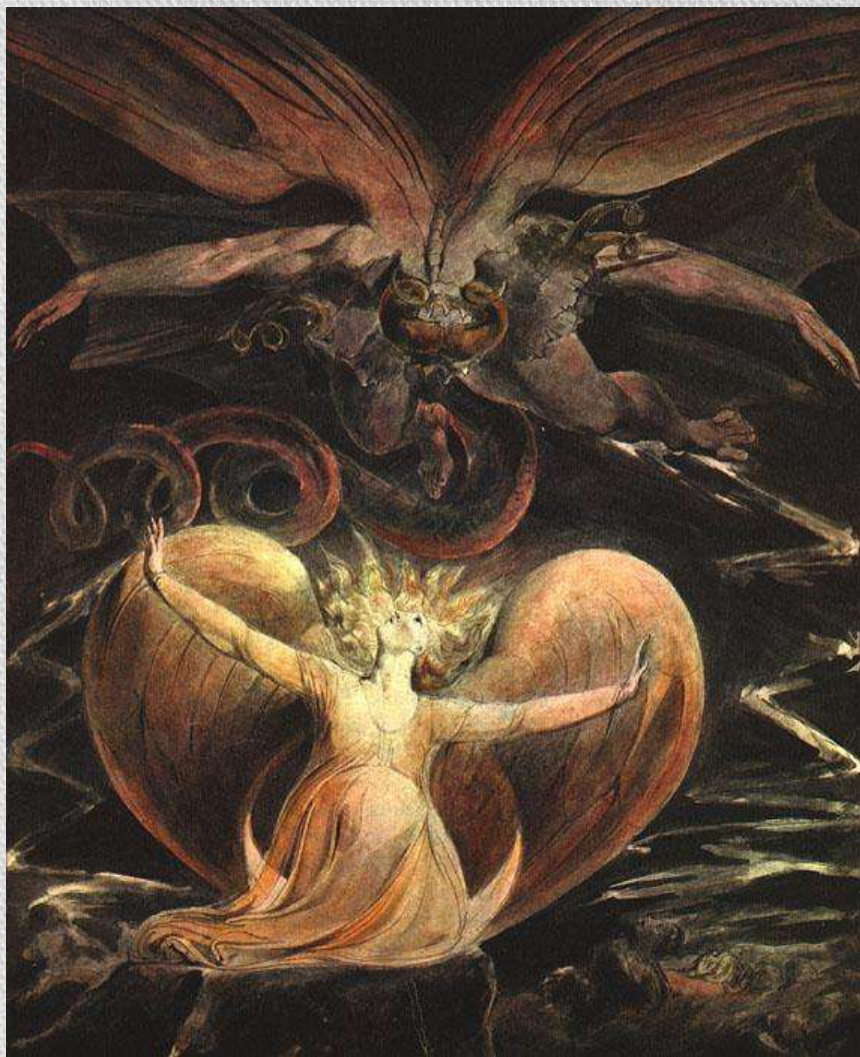
Blake's Religious and Political Views

- He was politically rebellious and mixed with radicals.
- Blake strongly criticized how the capitalist and industrialized system abused its people, saying that the "dark satanic mills left men unemployed, killed children and forced prostitution."
- Though a devout Christian, Blake also attacked the English Church because he thought the doctrines were being misused as a form of social control meant to encourage the people to be passively obedient and accept oppression, poverty, and inequality.

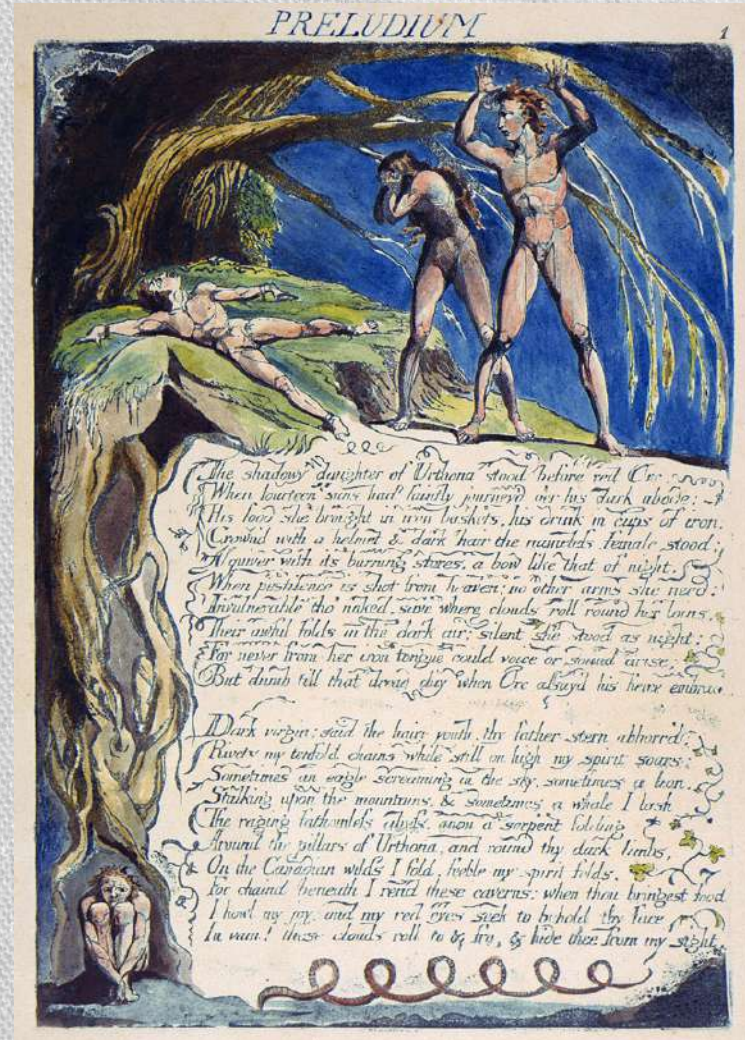
Blake's Artistic and Poetic Vision

- Often called a visionary artist, Blake crafted a variety of poetry, paintings, drawings, and engravings throughout his life.
- As a poet, Blake is considered a symbolist, or a mystic; many poems are obscure and can be interpreted only symbolically.
- Blake used his art and poetry as a way to inspire imagination instead of reason and logic.

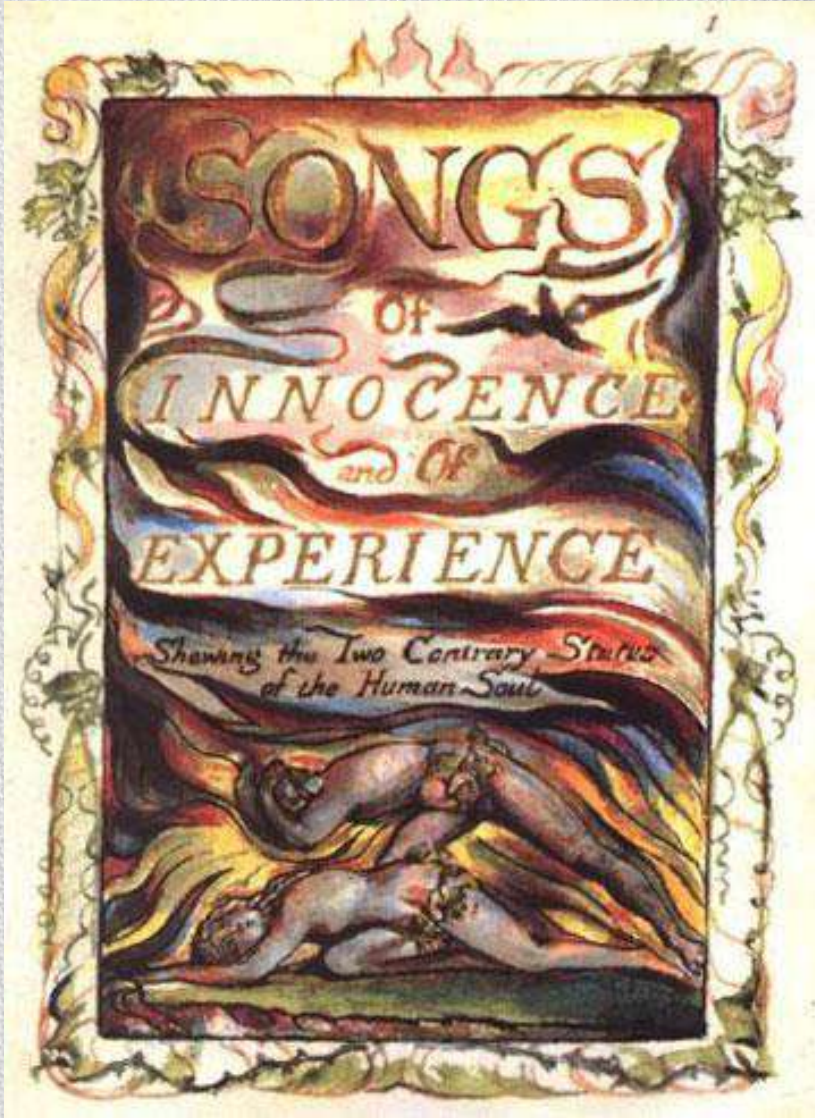
Blake's Artwork



Blake's Engraved Poetry



Songs of Innocence and Experience



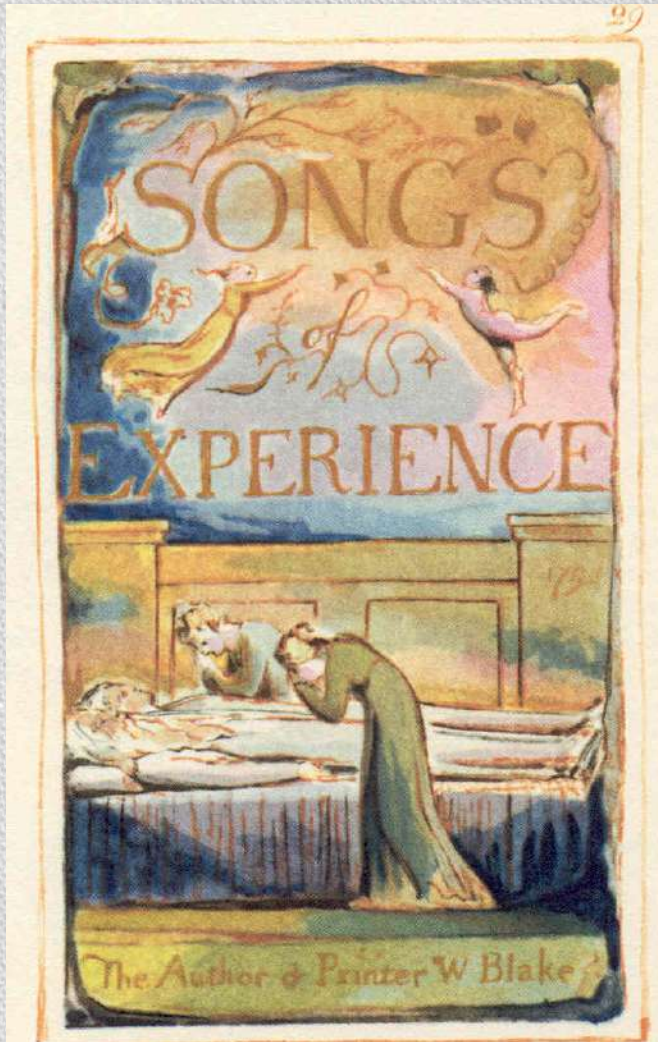
- *Songs of Innocence* were published in 1789.
- *Songs of Experience* were combined with the *Songs of Innocence* in 1794.
- The combined edition has the following subtitle:
“Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul.”

Songs of Innocence



- According to Blake, “innocence” is a state of genuine love and naïve trust toward all humankind, and a unquestioned belief in Christianity.
- These poems present a happy world full of **GOOD** and without suffering; all is in harmony.
- Formatted as a children’s book with joyful tones and singsong rhymes.

Songs of Experience



- The state of “experience” marks how one can clearly see the cruelty and hypocrisy of human nature and society.
- These poems show the sufferings of the miserable and poor because as a person gains “experience,” he also gains a fuller understanding of the power of **EVIL**, misery, and pain.
- Also formatted as a children’s book, but the tones are angry, fearful, and dark.

Brainstorm

- Make a list of the connotations you associate with a lamb and a tiger. Think of at least five concepts, ideas, people, and/or items for each.
- Be prepared to share.

“The Lamb”

- Symbolism:
 - Lamb = Jesus (“Lamb of God”)
- Tone: joyful, bright, happy
- Reveals his confidence in his simple Christian faith and his innocent acceptance of its teachings—but there is a noticeable absence of “evil.”

“The Tyger”

- Companion piece to “The Lamb”
 - “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?”
- Symbolism:
 - Blacksmith = God/Creator
 - Tyger = evil/violence
- Tone: dark, fearful, questioning
- Speaker questions the reason for the existence of evil in the world; did God create evil?
- Blake concludes that “without contraries is no progression.”