**William Blake** (1757-1827) IMAGINATION, ENERGY

did not have a part in shaping the new literary taste; he was discovered 50 years after his death  
 almost completely unknown in his age because:

**1**. created an idiosycratic visionary universe - contemporaries regarded his ideas completely "mad"; mythical characters: Urizen, Luvah, Los and Tharmas (Blake's poetic credo: "What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care." (*Letter*; August 23, 1799);

**2**. consciously repudiated the major ideas of Enlightenment; (considered Bacon, Newton and Locke=the unholy trinity )

**3**. unusual mode of publication of his poems (illustrated, engraved his works; limited number of hand-made copies; "**composite art**" of verbal and visual)

*Poetical Sketches* (1783) poems composed between Blake's 12th and 20th years; contains most of the important genres of the Age of Sensibility, but boldly experimental in metrics and imagery

***Songs of Innocence and of Experience / Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul***(1789-94) his best-loved work; the only one that attracted the attention of his contemporaries  
*Innocence* series printed in 1789 in 22 copies; combined *Innocence and Experience* appeared in 1794 in 28 copies (cf. Byron's first editions of 18,000 sold out overnight!)

state of Innocence and Experience: not opposites but contrasts, which complement each other  
parallel, complementary and contrastive poems in the two series (e.g. "Introduction", "Holy Thursday", "The Divine Image", "Lamb" and "Tyger", "The Ecchoing Green" and "Nurse's Song")

Innocence: introduced by the piper inspired by an angel-like child; quasi-idyllic world of pastorals and psalms;

central figures: child, lamb, flower, piper, shepherd, nurse;

main elements: humble life in uncorrupted nature, uninhibited sexuality, Poet-Christ-Divine Providence ("The Shepherd");

yet! the inhabitants of Innocence are not immune from menace: they get lost or punished, live in orphanages, sold as slaves or chimney sweeps ("The Little Boy Lost", "The Little Black Boy", "The Chimney Sweeper");

inhabitants unaware of dangers, dependent on the Nurse, Shepherd, Angel, Christ;

children victimized by circumstances and consoled by the false morality of Church ("The Chimney Sweeper");

despite their vulnerabiliy these children retain a spiritual resilience and believe in a better world

**Experience**: introduced by the ancient Bard, "Who Present, Past & Future sees";

dark, self-enclosed, claustrophobic world;

dominant images: prematurely blighted and embittered children, dark forests, sick flowers, wild beasts, black city, poisonous Tree of Mystery that grows in the human brain, hostile (instead of protective) adults;

strong criticism of contemporary society, politics ("London", "The Human Abstract", "The Chimney Sweeper") and the religious dogmas of the Church, most emphatically its restriction of freedom of emotions and sexuality ("The Garden of Love", "A Little Girl Lost", The Sick Rose"), Old Testament God=Nobodaddy, restricter and bounder of freedom ("Earth's Answer")  
"The Tyger": a symbolic poem; one possible level of interpretation: tyger=represents the sublime, poetic imagination in constant fight with Nobodaddy, the creator, the traditional view of God; (for Blake the only acceptable God is the creative/poetic Imagination, who is Jesus Christ "Thou art a Man, God is no more; / Thy own humanity learn to adore, / For that is my Spirit of Life" (from *The Everlasting Gospel*)

Further works:

mythological epics: *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Los;*

political trilogy: *America: A Prophecy;*  *Europe: A Prophecy; The Song of Los*

major prophetic books: *Vala; Milton*  and *Jerusalem*

Wordsworth on the *Songs:* "There is no doubt this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the Sanity of Lord Byron & Walter Scott".  
Coleridge read and commented on the *Songs* with extraordinary attention; " Blake [is] a man of Genius ... a mystic emphatically ...I am in the very mire of common-place common-sense compared with Mr Blake, apo- or rather ana-calyptic Poet, and Painter!"  
*Fine Arts Quarterly Review* III (October, 1864) : "After carefully weighing the matter, it is impossible to doubt that William Blake was the maddest of authors and artists, an extraordinary genius among madmen."  
Blake: "It is very true what you have said for these thirty two Years[.] I am Mad or Else you are So[;] both of us cannot be right in our Senses[.] Posterity will judge by our Works."

Posterity:

Allen Ginsberg, Jim Morrison (The Doors), Bruce Dickinson, Ulver, U2

Hugh Hudson (*Chariots of Fire*); Thomas Harris (*The Silence of the Lambs*); Jim Jarmusch (*The Dead*)