

## Blake and the diversity of influences over his poetry

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### Abstract

William Blake's poetry falls into three main categories. First, there are the lyrics, of which the most important ones are the Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience. In this category we find the earlier poems included in the Poetical Sketches (1769-78), many of which are indeed experiments in which Blake partially imitates earlier writers such as Shakespeare and others. Some manuscripts can be included in the first category, such as 'Pickering Manuscript', 'The Mental Traveller', 'The Crystal Cabinet', which are essential to understand Blake's developing mythology.

In the second category or group of poems we have the short prophecies which include: "Tiriell" (1789), "The Book of Thel" (1789), "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (1790-1793), "The Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (1793), "America" (1793), "The Book of Urizen" (1794), etc., which build up a mythology created by Blake in regard to the creation of the world and the nature of God. These "short prophecy" books should be read in conjunction with the historical events and the background of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century. Therefore, they are very complex works, which need to be read at mythological, historical and psychological levels and above all as works of art in their own right.

In the third category or group of poems we have the long prophecies that include "The Four Zoas" (1795-1804), "Milton" (1804-1808) and "Jerusalem". Writing them in epic form, Blake strove to provide an account of the human history from its beginnings to his day.

William Blake was widely influenced by the Swedish visionary and religious thinker, Emanuel Swedenborg, by the German mystic Jakob Böhme, as well as the esoteric doctrine of Rosicrucianism<sup>1</sup>, which had had its adherents in England since Robert Fludd. Blake was influenced by mystical and magical ideas, and since Blake was himself a visionary, his ideas often times came in the form of clearly visualized encounters with angels, prophets or other symbolic characters. Blake's poems and prophetic books, except for his first volume of poems, Poetical Sketches, were etched by himself on copper plates with decorative designs. He was an engraver by profession, and his work as a poet and prophet was little known during his lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** William Blake, diversity, poetry.

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