The Fly

POEM TEXT

Little Fly
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink and sing,
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life
And strength and breath,
And the want
Of thought is death,

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

SUMMARY

Oh, tiny fly: I've ended your joyful summer flight, unthinkingly killing you with a swipe of my hand.

Aren't I a fly just like you? And aren't you a man just like me?

After all, I'll only dance, drink, and sing until some unseeing hand wipes *my* life away.

If thought is born from living, breathing bodies, and if death is thus the absence of thought—

Well, then, I'll be a happy fly whether I'm alive or dead.

THEMES

DEATH, MORTALITY, AND PLEASURE

Like a lot of poems about squashed flies, "The Fly" reflects on the brevity of life and the unpredictability of death. Death, the poem's speaker claims, strikes at random, without either warning or meaning; people should therefore enjoy their time on earth while they still can.

Regretting that his "thoughtless hand" has smacked a "Little Fly" dead right in the middle of its "summer's play," the speaker muses that, really, he and the fly are in the same boat. Just as he's killed this fly without even thinking about it (and perhaps without meaning to), "some blind hand" will one day "brush [the speaker's] wing": his life will end as suddenly and as arbitrarily as the fly's did. Symbolically, here, the fly plays the same role it has in countless other works of art, suggesting that life is brief and fragile.

The speaker's image of death coming from the swipe of "some blind hand" further suggests that the death-dealing universe (or God) is unfeeling, or at least arbitrary. In this speaker's view, death is just the inevitable consequence of the universe's random and "thoughtless" motion. And if that's true, all that people need to do with their lives is "dance and drink and sing," enjoying themselves like "happy fl[ies]" until the meaningless oblivion of death strikes.

Readers should note, though, that the poem's author likely doesn't see eye-to-eye with the speaker about any of these ideas. The poem's potentially ironic phrasing (in which the speaker treats debatable ideas like "am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me?" as self-evident rhetorical questions) suggests that this speaker is rather shortsighted and limited in more ways than one!

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

THE MYSTERY AND WONDER OF EXISTENCE

After accidentally killing a fly, this poem's speaker muses that he and the fly are just the same. Like a fly, the speaker says, he himself will only have "thought" (that is, consciousness) so long as he has "life and strength and breath": in other words, his experience of the world will only exist as long as his bodily life does, and his life will end just as suddenly and arbitrarily as the fly's did. If that's the case, then the

speaker and fly alike can be "happy" whether they live or die: if "thought" dies with the body, they won't even know that they're dead, and can just blithely get on with the dancing and drinking and singing until the oblivion of death hits.

However, the poem's phrasing throws ironic doubt on this philosophy; the *poet* doesn't necessarily agree with the *speaker*! To believe that consciousness is just a mechanical function of the body (a view known as materialism) and that there's thus no difference between a man and a fly, this poem might suggest, is to oversimplify the complexity, mystery, and wonder of existence.

Remorseful over accidentally killing a fly, the poem's speaker tries to at least take a lesson from its death: "am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me?" he asks. In other words, he tries to use the fly's death as a reminder of life's brevity and his own mortality—a familiar and ancient piece of symbolism. Since human lives and fly lives get "brush[ed] away" just the same by "thoughtless hand[s]"—the fly's life by the speaker's hand, the speaker's life (eventually) by "some blind hand"—then the speaker might as well be a fly, and the fly might as well be the speaker.

Similarly, the speaker feels that he and the fly are the same because they have conscious "thought" only so long as they have "life and strength and breath": consciousness, in his view, is just a bodily process, the same as digestion or growth. If that's true, death will end "thought" just as it ends "breath"; his consciousness, like the fly's, will vanish into oblivion.

With these ideas in mind, the speaker can cheerfully resign himself to being a "happy fly": like the fly he swatted, all he has to do with his life is "dance and drink and sing," enjoying himself until death comes along and snuffs him out.

However: everything the speaker says, the poem's phrasing potentially undercuts. Many of the speaker's statements are in the form of apparently rhetorical questions that might not actually be so rhetorical. When the speaker asks "am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me?" for example, the reader could easily answer: *Well, no!* To say that there's no difference between a person and a fly is to overlook the fact that there self-evidently *is*. Similarly, the "if" in "If thought is life / And strength and breath" is a very big "if" indeed.

The poem thus might subtly suggest that the speaker's materialistic outlook, in which a human being's life and a fly's life are just bigger and smaller versions of the same physical processes, is a reductive and foolish one. Life and consciousness, the poem's language hints, are mysteries too big to be wrapped up in this speaker's tidy materialist package.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Little Fly
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.

"The Fly" begins with a cry of regret. The speaker, alarmed to discover that he's just accidentally swatted a fly, addresses it with remorseful affection, calling it "Little Fly" and observing that his "thoughtless hand" has brought an end to its "summer's play." His language makes it sound more as if he's killed a duckling than a fly.

Of course, it's pretty easy to kill a fly "thoughtless[ly]": such a small, fragile bug can be "brushed away" completely by accident—or by "thoughtless" reflex, for that matter, if it lands on one's face. The idea that it's the speaker's "thoughtless hand" that does the brushing here supports that reflexive reading; this swatting was an instinctive act of the speaker's body, not his conscious choice.

Most fly-swatting is so "thoughtless" that the swatter barely even registers what they've done. This speaker, however, is pausing to consider this everyday swatting more carefully. Addressing the fly directly, he treats it as a creature that was *enjoying* its "summer's play": in other words, as a conscious being that would probably have preferred to remain alive, just like the speaker himself.

In these first few lines, readers familiar with fly symbolism might get the sense that this will be a poem about how fragile and temporary life is. Flies traditionally symbolize death both because they're so easily squashed and because they tend to turn up where dead meat is available. But the speaker's response to the fly will go much deeper than a reflection on mortality. He's interested not just in the fact that he and the fly are both mortal, but that he and the fly are both *conscious* (or were, anyway). This will be a poem about the mysterious relationship between the mind and body.

That might come as a surprise to readers who glance at the poem's form. In a mere five quatrains of short, thumping dimeter lines (that is, lines with only two strong stresses apiece: "Little Fly"), there might not seem to be much room to explore consciousness itself. The singsong ABCB rhyme scheme similarly suggests nursery rhymes more than philosophy.

But as is so often the case in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, all that simplicity is deceptive.

LINES 5-8

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou

A man like me?

As the first stanza hinted, the speaker is feeling serious sympathy for the "Little Fly"—so much so that it leads him to ask, philosophically, "Am not I / A fly like thee?"

At first, this rhetorical question appears to be drawing on the grand old tradition of fly symbolism: declaring that he's basically a fly, the speaker seems to say, *Couldn't my life end just as suddenly and arbitrarily as yours did, little buddy?*

Things start to get more complicated when he turns that question around the other way. Listen to the parallelism here:

> Am not I
> A fly like thee?
> Or art not thou
> A man like me?

If a man is a fly, the speaker's repeated phrasing here seems to suggest, then a fly must logically also be a man.

It's at this point that the alert reader might say, *Well, wait, hang on a minute*. It's one thing to say, alongside Shakespeare's Gloucester, that "as flies to wanton boys are we to the gods"—that people are fly-like because the gods swat them down without warning. It's another to say that a fly is therefore human-like.

In other words: certainly there's a similarity between flies and humans in that both are alive one day and dead the next. But to say a fly is a "man like me" is to open a whole different argument. A "man," after all, isn't a symbol for mortality to a fly the way that a fly is a symbol of mortality to a man—and the capacity for symbolic thought is just one of the *numerous* qualities that separate people and flies. The metaphor just doesn't mean the same thing in both directions!

The rhetorical questions here thus aren't so rhetorical after all. But as the next stanza will show, this speaker seems to think they are. This stanza introduces the first note of an irony that will pervade the poem: the author does not necessarily agree with the speaker.

LINES 9-12

For I dance
And drink and sing,
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

Explaining his claim that "fly" and "man" are pretty much interchangeable positions, the speaker suggests that the similarity between bug and human is in the way they live their lives. Like the fly at its "summer's play," the speaker says, he'll "dance / and drink and sing" until "some blind hand" brushes his own life away. Fly and human, he feels, both live lives of simple bodily pleasure until an arbitrary death cuts them off.

Note the meaningful repetitions and parallels here. In the first stanza, the speaker's "thoughtless hand [...] brushed away" the fly; here, the speaker imagines "some blind hand [...] brush[ing his] wing." The language here makes death seem arbitrary and meaningless. The speaker isn't even particularly curious about what "blind hand" will blot him out someday: it's just "some blind hand," some unthinking and uncaring force. Just as any old "thoughtless hand" could have killed the fly he's addressing, any old "blind hand" will kill him. Whose hand is it? Fate's, the gods', God's? This speaker doesn't seem interested in exploring the question much more deeply.

For that matter, he imagines his life as one of "danc[ing] / and drink[ing] and sing[ing]"—in sum, as one long evening at the pub—and feels that there's no difference between that kind of pleasure and a fly's pleasure as it zips around at its "summer's play." The attitude here might be summarized as: *life is fun, then you die; who knows (or cares) why?*

LINES 13-16

If thought is life
And strength and breath,
And the want
Of thought is death,

The first few stanzas of the poem have depicted a sweet-natured speaker, remorseful over his thoughtless fly-swatting, trying to make himself feel better by reflecting that he and the fly are in essentially the same predicament. For fly and man alike, he claims, life is just a party that ends without warning, reason, or meaning.

The foundations of the speaker's reasoning come into focus in the fourth stanza:

> If thought is life
> And strength and breath,
> And the want
> Of thought is death,

In other words, the speaker is a materialist. If "thought"—consciousness—*is* "life / And strength and breath," then it's just a matter of matter: a biological process like digestion and respiration. Therefore, the "want" (or lack) of thought is what death is: death ends consciousness just as it ends those other processes. (Note, though, that Blake's sentence structure here can also turn that idea inside out, suggesting that "thought" *creates* life, and that when thought leaves, death results.)

This makes more sense of the speaker's idea that fly and man are basically interchangeable. Both fly and man are just animated matter, and since their consciousnesses will end at death, what difference does it make if they live or die? Once "thought" is gone, they won't *know* they're dead. Therefore, why worry about killing a fly, or about being swatted down by "some blind hand" oneself? Just "dance / And drink and sing,"

simpleminded as a fly on a summer breeze.

Notice that the argumentation here parallels the speaker's earlier not-so-rhetorical questions. Back in the second stanza, the speaker was a fly and the fly was a man. Here, "thought is life" and the "want / Of thought is death." And just as in the second stanza, the poem's phrasing here casts doubt on those assertions. This stanza's declaration of materialism begins with a loaded word: "If."

For that matter, the speaker's own self-description in the first stanza calls his ideas into question. If "thought is life," then how can a living "hand" be "thoughtless"? In separating his conscious intention from his hand's motives (and himself from his hand!), the speaker seems to want to have it both ways.

LINES 17-20

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

The previous stanza started with an "If," the speaker's philosophical proposition. The final stanza meets that "If" with a logical "Then": If consciousness is just a biological function, the speaker argues, then he can be a "happy fly" whether he lives or dies.

In the speaker's view, then:

- There's no important difference between "fly" and "man": both are just animated meat, enjoying itself.
- Consciousness lasts only as long as physical life does.
- There's thus nothing much to fear either from life or from death. Alive, one can "dance / And drink and sing" to one's heart's content; dead, one won't care what happens one way or the other, for one's consciousness (like one's breathing and eating) will stop.
- Therefore: why worry? Whether one kills a fly or is killed oneself, it's all the same.

All along, though, the poem has ironically hinted that the poem's *author* and its *speaker* aren't on the same page about this. The false equivalency of "man=fly, therefore fly=man" was the first warning. The great big "If" of "If thought is life / And strength and breath" is the next.

Readers familiar with Blake's work will know just how frustrated he was with the kind of materialistic thinking his speaker displays. In Blake's idiosyncratic philosophy, "every Bird that cuts the airy way" might be "an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five": in other words, the whole world was full of divinity, a divinity that couldn't be perceived or comprehended by the senses alone (as a materialist or an empiricist would argue).

By presenting a materialist speaker's limitations, contradictions, and unease, this poem suggests that materialism is an inadequate response to the mystery of existence: a way of throwing up one's "thoughtless hand[s]" and living in darkness.

SYMBOLS

THE FLY

The speaker takes the fly he's just squashed as a symbol of death and mortality. In doing so, he's drawing on ancient tradition: flies, both easily squished and associated with rotting corpses, are doubly appropriate as images of life's brevity.

In saying that he's a fly, the speaker is saying that his life is just as brief and fragile as that of the fly he just swatted.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-8:** "Little Fly / Thy summer's play / My thoughtless hand / Has brushed away. / Am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me?"

POETIC DEVICES

METAPHOR

The speaker's central metaphor—that he is a fly and the fly is him—raises the questions at this complex poem's heart.

Depicting himself as a fly just like the one he's squashed, the speaker at first seems to be drawing on a familiar symbolic tradition that makes flies the representatives of life's brevity and fragility. Like Gloucester in *King Lear*, he's saying that "as flies to wanton boys are we to the gods": the "blind hand" of fate or God smacks people down just as arbitrarily as a kid kills a fly.

The metaphor gets more complicated, though, when the speaker suggests that if he's basically a fly, the fly is *also* basically a "man like me." Both of them, he argues, "dance and drink and sing" until the moment of death, and both will completely lose "thought" (or consciousness) as soon as "life / And strength and breath" are gone.

This metaphor is essentially making a materialist argument: that is, it's suggesting that consciousness is just a biological function and that one life is therefore identical to another. A human and a fly are both just bits of animate meat enjoying themselves until they're dead.

Given that Blake himself wrote that the physical world was just the visible portion of the vast, complex, interconnected Soul that animated the universe, he likely did not *agree* with this

speaker's views. The deceptively straightforward metaphor of man-as-fly and fly-as-man thus invites readers to consider what's *missing* in the speaker's account of the world.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-12:** "Am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me? / For I dance / And drink and sing, / Till some blind hand / Shall brush my wing."

REPETITION

Weaving repetitions bring out the questions and contradictions in the speaker's philosophy of life.

Perhaps the most pointed flavor of repetition here is parallelism. Listen to the similar sentence structure in these lines:

> Am not I
> A fly like thee?
> Or art not thou
> A man like me?

Neatly lining these questions up with the same sentence structure, the speaker invites readers to see these questions as rhetorical and logical: these statements must be equally true. (Of course, as the poem hints, that's not necessarily the case!)

There's a similar parallel philosophy in the fourth stanza:

> If thought is life
> And strength and breath,
> And the want
> Of thought is death,

The speaker uses this system of logic—which argues that consciousness, "thought," is just the biological product of the body's "life"—to argue that he should live like a "happy fly," untroubled by anything but "danc[ing] / and drink[ing] and sing[ing]." (Note that the polysyndeton of "dance and drink and sing" in lines 9-10 also parallels "life and strength and breath" here, matching bodily pleasures with bodily functions.)

Finally, then, it's all the same to the speaker "if I live / Or if I die," a final parallel repetition that seems to tidy the whole problem away. But the world the speaker portrays here, in which his own "thoughtless hand" and the "blind hand" of fate, death, or the gods sweep life away meaninglessly, isn't one that his author would agree with.

The poem's neat, elegant repetitions thus create a surface appearance of unimpeachable logic—but all the while, they invite the reader to question whether life is as simple and clear as the speaker seems to believe.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "thoughtless," "hand"
- **Lines 5-8:** "Am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me?"
- **Lines 9-10:** "dance / And drink and sing,"
- **Line 11:** "blind hand"
- **Lines 13-14:** "thought is life / And strength and breath,"
- **Lines 15-16:** "And the want / Of thought is death,"
- **Line 19:** "If I live,"
- **Line 20:** "if I die."

RHETORICAL QUESTION

In the poem's second stanza, the speaker asks a pair of apparently rhetorical questions:

> Am not I
> A fly like thee?
> Or art not thou
> A man like me?

On one level, the speaker is asking a classic fly-related question: *Aren't flies and humans both equally mortal?* In asking this, he's drawing on a long symbolic tradition in which flies—easily swatted, living on dead meat—represent life's brevity and the inevitability of death.

However, the claim he's making here is stronger and more specific. Not only does he suggest that he *is* a fly just like his squashed victim, but he also suggests that the fly is also *him*.

Here, the reader might say, *Now, wait a minute*. Perhaps these questions aren't so rhetorical after all! Perhaps they're actually meant to invite readers to consider everything that *separates* humanity and flies. Besides the obvious physical stuff, so far as one can tell there's a pretty big difference between human consciousness and fly consciousness. Flies have written remarkably little poetry, just for instance (though cockroaches have been known to compose).

In other words, the speaker's cheerfully materialistic view of the world might not be quite airtight. It's one thing to say that a person's life is like a fly's in that a person's life can end without warning. It's quite another to say that a fly and a human being might as well be each other—that their lives are just biological processes, equally meaningful or meaningless. Such a belief does a disservice to what the visionary Blake saw as a world infused with divinity.

As such, the poet might be presenting these questions ironically. That is, the questions "Am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me?" aren't nearly as simplistically rhetorical as the speaker seems to feel. The words "thought is life / And strength and breath," meanwhile, are introduced with a heavy "If."

These notes of uncertainty suggest that the *author's* perspective might well not align with the *speaker's*. For that matter, though, they also suggest that the speaker himself may feel a little bit of unease about this view of the world. His pitying address to the "Little Fly" itself suggests that there's more to the world than plain old animal life and death.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-8:** "Am not I / A fly like thee? / Or art not thou / A man like me?"

ALLITERATION

The poem uses alliteration in its third stanza. Listen to the bold /d/ and /b/ sounds, as well as the smooth /s/ sounds in the following lines:

> For I **d**ance
> And **d**rink and **s**ing,
> Till **s**ome **b**lind hand
> Shall **b**rush my wing.

The shared sounds add music and melody to these lines about drinking and dancing and singing. Alliteration thus makes the speaker's vision of enjoying life all the more vivid for the reader.

There's consonance (/nd/ and /sh/ sounds) and assonance (short /i/ sounds) here, too, which heightens the language even more:

> For I dance
> And drink and sing,
> Till some blind hand
> Shall brush my wing.

Together, all these sonic devices make these lines about life sound, not coincidentally, more *lively*.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 9:** "dance"
- **Line 10:** "drink," "sing"
- **Line 11:** "some," "blind"
- **Line 12:** "brush"

VOCABULARY

Thy, thee, thou (Line 2, Line 6, Line 7) - Old-fashioned ways of saying "you" (thee, thou) or "your" (thy).

The want of thought (Lines 15-16) - That is, the lack of thought, the absence of thought.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Fly," like many of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, uses a deceptively simple form to investigate vast questions. The poem is built from five four-line stanzas (or quatrains) in accentual dimeter (that is, lines with two strong stresses apiece: "Little Fly"). The lines are strikingly short, never more than four words long; every single word here counts.

On the surface, then, this is a short, simple poem built on familiar symbolism. Writers long before and long after Blake have used flies as images of life's brevity. As ever with Blake, though, there's more here than meets the eye at first. The poem's apparent claim that "thought is life / And strength and breath" is qualified by a big "If."

METER

"The Fly" is written in accentual dimeter. That means that each line uses two strong stresses, but not a consistent pattern of metrical feet.

For instance, listen to the rhythms of the last stanza:

> Then am I
> A happy fly,
> If I live,
> Or if I die.

Accentual meter feels earthy and folky; here, those one-two stresses hit like marching feet or a hand pounding a table (perhaps "thoughtless[ly]" whacking a fly on the way). These short, punchy lines give the poem a deceptive simplicity; perhaps they even help to suggest the *over*-simplicity of the speaker's worldview.

RHYME SCHEME

"The Fly" uses this simple rhyme scheme nearly all the way through:

ABCB

This old, old pattern might be familiar to readers from ballads and nursery rhymes. Blake often used traditional, folky flavors of rhyme and meter in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, smuggling grand ideas in plain packages.

Notice, though, that there's a variation here, right at the very end. The final stanza runs like this:

AABA

All those tight, neat A rhymes make it seem as if the speaker's conclusion—that it's an equally "happy" fate to live or die—is as simple as dusting one's hands off. But not all is as it seems: the poem might equally be read as questioning this idea. The first

word in "If thought is live / And strength and breath" is a very big "if" indeed.

SPEAKER

The reader learns nothing about this poem's elusive speaker beyond the fact that he's just accidentally killed a fly. From that moment on, everything the speaker says is more a riddle than a statement of belief or a revelation of personality. On a surface level, the speaker seems to say that the lesson he takes from the fly's death is to be perfectly "happy" either to live or to die: if the body's "life" is the source of consciousness, and consciousness therefore ends at death, then why does one's own death mean anything more than a fly's?

Notice, however, that the word with which the poem introduces that philosophy is a great big "if"! The materialist worldview the speaker lays out here isn't necessarily what the *author* believes. That wiggle room for irony is one of the hallmarks of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. (Compare, for instance, "Holy Thursday," in which the pious *speaker's* pleasure in watching a parade of orphans reveals the *author's* outrage at society's hypocritical cruelty to children.)

SETTING

The only thing readers learn about this poem's setting is the season: the fly the speaker accidentally kills in the first stanza was enjoying its "summer's play," winging around in the sunshine, before its untimely demise. The general vagueness of the setting suggests that the questions about life, death, and consciousness the speaker bats around here are timeless and universal ones, not tied to any particular era or place.

That the fly dies in the summer, though, does suggest that death doesn't obey any of the usual laws of symbolism. Summer is traditionally imagined as a time of vibrant life—but that just doesn't matter to the "blind hand" of death, which falls seemingly at random.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

William Blake (1757-1827) is a poet unlike any other. Often considered one of the first of the English Romantics, he also stands apart from any movement as a unique philosopher, prophet, and artist.

Blake first printed "The Fly" in *Songs of Experience* (1794), the second volume of his important collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. This two-part book examines what Blake called "the two contrary states of the human soul." Many of the poems in *Songs of Innocence* have a counterpart in *Songs of Experience*, a twin poem that reads the same subjects from a new perspective. For instance, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" both explore creation, divinity, and nature, but in very different ways.

Blake conceived most of his poems not just as text, but as illuminated manuscripts in which images deepen (and sometimes complicate or contradict) the meanings of the words. (See an image of "The Fly," linked in the Resources section, for one excellent example.)

Blake designed, engraved, printed, painted, and published his works himself, using a technique he called the "infernal method." In this process, he painted his poems and pictures on copper plates with a resilient ink, then burned away the excess copper in a bath of acid—the opposite of the process most engravers used. But then, Blake often did the opposite of what other people did, believing that it was his role to "reveal the infinite that was hid" by custom and falsehood.

Even among the often countercultural Romantics, then, Blake was an outlier. Samuel Taylor Coleridge—himself no stranger to a wild vision—once remarked that he was "in the very mire of common-place common-sense compared with Mr. Blake."

While Blake was never widely known during his lifetime, he has become one of the most famous and beloved of poets since his death, and writers from Allen Ginsberg to Olga Tokarczuk to Philip Pullman claim him as a major influence.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

William Blake was a deeply religious man, but he was highly critical of *organized* religion. He was born to a family of Dissenters, a group of English Protestants who broke away from and rebelled against the Church of England (and instilled in Blake an early distrust of the religious status quo). He generally saw top-down religious structures as getting in the way of a direct relationship between humanity and God.

For that matter, he believed—and memorably said, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that "everything that lives is holy." To Blake, the whole world was infused with divinity, which people could see if only they opened their eyes to the "infinite that was hid" behind the illusions of custom and daily life. In this, he (like many of his Romantic contemporaries) rebelled against the rationalistic worldviews of 18th-century Enlightenment philosophers.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poem Set to Music — Listen to a musical version of the poem by Cosmo Sheldrake. (https://youtu.be/5jdsC7lbEMY)
- The Illuminated Poem — See the poem as Blake originally

imagined and printed it: as an illuminated manuscript. (http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/songsie.b?descId=songsie.b.illbk.47)

- A Biography and More — Find a wealth of resources on Blake at the British Library's website. (https://www.bl.uk/people/william-blake)
- Blake's Visionary View — Watch a short documentary about Blake's spiritual visions. (https://youtu.be/F8hcQ_jPIZA)
- More of Blake's Works — Visit the William Blake Archive to see more of his work. (http://www.blakearchive.org/)
- Blake's Beliefs — Read a short article on Blake's art that outlines his spiritual views (and his loathing of mechanistic philosophies). (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/aug/17/religion-william-blake)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM BLAKE POEMS

- A Dream
- Ah! Sun-flower
- A Poison Tree
- Holy Thursday (Songs of Innocence)
- London
- The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Experience)
- The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Innocence)
- The Clod and the Pebble
- The Divine Image
- The Ecchoing Green
- The Garden of Love
- The Lamb
- The Little Black Boy
- The Sick Rose
- The Tyger
- To Autumn
- To the Evening Star

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