

A POISON TREE

By William Blake

When interpreting and analysing a poem, we need to first know the poet's background so that we are better able to relate it to what he or she may be trying to convey.



Image from <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/william-blake>

About the Poet

He was born in 1757 in Soho, London, where he lived most of his life, and was son to a hosier and his wife. Blake's early ambitions lay not with poetry but with painting and at the age of 14, after attending drawing school. Blake studied at the Royal Academy, but he is known to have questioned the aesthetic doctrines of its president, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and his stay there was brief.

In 1784, he set up a print shop, but within a few years the business floundered and for the rest of his life Blake eked out a living as an engraver and illustrator. His wife, Catharine, whom he married in 1782, remained faithful and diligent and she helped him to print the illuminated poetry for which he is remembered today.

In 1789, he published his *Songs of Innocence*, the gentlest of his lyrics, but the collection was followed by *Songs of Experience*, containing a profound expression of adult corruption and repression. His long list of works shows relentless energy and drive. As one of the most complex writers known, it is impossible to summarise his career - he was a combination of extremes. His vision of civilisation as inevitably chaotic and contradictory mirrors the political turmoil of his era. It is only in retrospect that we can begin to appreciate his work and unravel its complex and allusive sources.