From Innocence to Experience in William Blake's The Book of Thel and the Visions of the Daughters of Albion

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Abstract
My thesis focuses on William Blake's challenge of the conventional Christianity of his time and his questioning of what he perceived as the hypocritical moral codes of the Church of England. Blake blames these codes for dominating and imprisoning humanity by preventing individuals from acting through their use of the imagination. For Blake, the imagination does not simply imply a creation of the imaginative faculty; instead, it refers to an imagination that is transforming and that becomes a measure of salvation and deliverance from the man-made codes that imprison humanity. These codes, while originating from and propagated by the Church of England, were also the social codes, generally accepted as the conventional morality of "common sense," the codes of "prudence."

Blake's observation that both sexes were oppressed by the strict moral codes of the Church appears evident in The Visions of the Daughters of Albion in 1793, when the virgin Oothoon chooses to enter the world of experience, she is raped by Bromion, the character who represents the enforcer of the codes. Oothoon fights the codes when she attempts to liberate herself by using the imagination and by creating a new perception of reality for herself. She also tries to liberate her lover, Theotormon, but he refuses to rebel against the Church's moral codes. His refusal to use his imagination to free himself causes Oothoon to remain an emotional slave to the codes of the Church and to remain a victim of her rapist's violence. Oothoon, however, achieves a limited liberation despite Theotormon's failure to liberate himself.

In The Book of Thel, Blake presents the virgin Thel, who, unlike Oothoon, retreats from life and experience and chooses to remain in her world of innocence. Thel initially desires to enter the world of experience and embarks on a quest for the meaning of her existence. During the quest, her brief encounter with experience and her fear of death teach her that she cannot cope with the realities and consequences of existing in the adult world. Death is Thel's ultimate source of anxiety that evokes her sexual repression. By seeing sex as the onset of death instead of the liberation of the imagination of which Blake writes, Thel fails to find freedom and to achieve unity of both mind and body. Blake's implication that Thel struggles with moral rejection and with the social and moral fear of having lost her virginity reflects his idea that the man-made moral codes inhibit humanity in the use of the imagination that, according to Blake, offers true salvation to mankind.

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fulfillment. In 1788, at the age of 31, Blake began to experiment with relief etching, which was the method used to produce most of his books of poems. The process is also referred to as illuminated printing, and final products as illuminated books or prints. Blake used illuminated printing for four of his works: the Songs of Innocence and Experience, The Book of Thel, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and Jerusalem. Later life and career. Blake's A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows. Frontispiece to William Blake's Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793), which contains Blake's critique of Judeo-Christian values of marriage. Contents 1 Plot 2 Symbolism 3 Trivia 4 Notes 5 External links Plot[edit]. The Book of Thel is a poem by William Blake, dated 1789 and probably composed in the period 1788 to 1790. It is illustrated by his own plates, and compared to his later prophetic books is relatively short and easier to understand. The metre is a fourteen-syllable line. It was preceded by Tiriel, which Blake left in manuscript. A few lines from Tiriel were incorporated into The Book of Thel. Most of the poem is in unrhymed verse. William Blake's prophetic books.