

TRANSLATED BY CLARE CAVANAGH

WINDY

On Friends & Foes
William Blake



ON FRIENDS AND FOES

William Blake

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- [i](#)
- [ii](#)
- [iii](#)
- [iv. Of Hayley's birth](#)
- [v. On Hayley](#)
- [vi. To Hayley](#)
- [vii. On Hayley's Friendship](#)
- [viii. On Hayley the Pickthank](#)
- [ix](#)
- [x. To Flaxman](#)
- [xi. To Flaxman](#)
- [To Nancy Flaxman](#)
- [xiii](#)
- [xiv. To Stothard](#)
- [xv. Cromek speaks](#)
- [xvi. On Stothard](#)
- [xvii. On Stothard](#)
- [xviii. Mr. Stothard to Mr. Cromek](#)
- [xix. Mr. Cromek to Mr. Stothard](#)
- [xx. On Cromek](#)
- [xxi. On Cromek](#)
- [xxii. On P--](#)
- [xxiii. On William Haines](#)
- [xxiv. On Fuseli](#)

- [xxv. To Hunt](#)
 - [xxvii. To Hunt](#)
 - [xxvii. On certain Mystics](#)
 - [xxviii](#)
 - [xxix](#)
 - [xxx](#)
 - [xxxi](#)
-

i

I am no Homer's hero you all know;
I profess not generosity to a foe.
My generosity is to my friends,
That for their friendship I may make amends.
The generous to enemies promotes their ends,
And becomes the enemy and betrayer of his friends.

ii

Anger and wrath my bosom rends:
I thought them the errors of friends.
But all my limbs with warmth glow:
I find them the errors of the foe.

iii

If you play a game of chance, know, before you begin,
If you are benevolent you will never win.

iv. Of Hayley's birth

Of H—'s birth this was the happy lot:

His mother on his father him begot.

v. On Hayley

To forgive enemies H— does pretend,
Who never in his life forgave a friend,
And when he could not act upon my wife
Hired a villain to bereave my life.

vi. To Hayley

Thy friendship oft has made my heart to ache:
Do be my enemy — for friendship's sake.

vii. On Hayley's Friendship

When H—y finds out what you cannot do,
That is the very thing he'll set you to;
If you break not your neck, 'tis not his fault;
But pecks of poison are not pecks of salt.

viii. On Hayley the Pickthank

I write the rascal thanks, till he and I
With thanks and compliments are quite drawn dry.

ix

My title as a genius thus is prov'd:
Not prais'd by Hayley, nor by Flaxman lov'd.

x. To Flaxman

You call me mad, 'tis folly to do so,
To seek to turn a madman to a foe.

If you think as you speak, you are an ass;
If you do not, you are but what you was.

xi. To Flaxman

I mock thee not, though I by thee am mockèd;
Thou call'st me madman, but I call thee blockhead.

To Nancy Flaxman

How can I help thy husband's copying me?
Should that make difference 'twixt me and thee?

xiii

To Flaxman and Stothard

I found them blind: I taught them how to see;
And now they know neither themselves nor me.
'Tis excellent to turn a thorn to a pin,
A fool to a bolt, a knave to a glass of gin.

xiv. To Stothard

You all your youth observ'd the golden rule,
Till you're at last become the golden fool:
I sport with fortune, merry, blithe and gay,
Like to the lion sporting with his prey.
Take you the hide and horns which you may wear,
Mine is the flesh — the bones may be your share.

xv. Cromeek speaks

I always take my judgement from a fool
Because his judgement is so very cool;

Not prejudiced by feelings great or small,
Amiable state! he cannot feel at all.

xvi. On Stothard

You say reserve and modesty he has,
Whose heart is iron, his head wood, and his face brass.
The fox, the owl, the beetle, and the bat
By sweet reserve and modesty get fat.

xvii. On Stothard

S—, in childhood, on the nursery floor,
Was extreme old and most extremely poor;
He has grown old, and rich, and what he will;
He is extreme old, and extreme poor still.

xviii. Mr. Stothard to Mr. Cromeek

For Fortune's favours you your riches bring,
But Fortune says she gave you no such thing
Why should you be ungrateful to your friends,—
Sneaking and backbiting, and odds and ends?

xix. Mr. Cromeek to Mr. Stothard

Fortune favours the brave, old proverbs say;
But not with money; that is not the way.
Turn back! turn back! you travel all in vain;
Turn through the iron gate down Sneaking Lane.

xx. On Cromeek

Cr—loves artists as he loves his meat:

He loves the Art; but 'tis the art to cheat.

xxi. On Cromek

A petty sneaking knave I knew—
O! Mr. Cr—, how do ye do?

xxii. On P—

P—lovèd me not as he lov'd his friends;
For he lov'd them for gain, to serve his ends:
He lovèd me, and for no gain at all,
But to rejoice and triumph in my fall.

xxiii. On William Haines

The Sussex men are noted fools,
And weak is their brain pan —
I wonder if H—the painter
Is not a Sussex man.

xxiv. On Fuseli

The only man that e'er I knew
Who did not make me almost spew
Was Fuseli: he was both Turk and Jew—
And so, dear Christian friends, how do you do?

xxv. To Hunt

`Madman' I have been call'd: `Fool' they call thee.
I wonder which they envy — thee or me?

xxvii. To Hunt

You think Fuseli is not a great painter. I'm glad.
This is one of the best compliments he ever had.

xxvii. On certain Mystics

Cosway, Frazer, and Baldwin of Egypt's lake
Fear to associate with Blake.
This life is a warfare against evils;
They heal the sick: he casts out devils.

Hayley, Flaxman, and Stothard are also in doubt
Lest their virtue should be put to the rout.
One grins, t'other spits, and in corners hides,
And all the virtuous have shown their backsides.

xxviii

—And his legs carried it like a long fork,
Reached all the way from Chichester to York,
From York all across Scotland to the sea;
This was a man of men, as seems to me.
Not only in his mouth his own soul lay,
But my soul also would he bear away.
Like as a pedlar bears his weary pack,
He would hear my soul buckled to his back.
But once, alas! committing a mistake,
He bore the wretched soul of William Blake
That he might turn it into eggs of gold;
But neither back nor mouth those eggs could hold.
His under jaw dropp'd as those eggs he laid,
And all my eggs are addled and decay'd.
The Examiner, whose very name is Hunt,
Call'd Death a madman, trembling for the affront;

Like trembling hare sits on his weakly paper
On which he used to dance and sport and caper.
Yorkshire Jack Hemp and Quibble, blushing daw,
Clapp'd Death into the corner of their jaw,
And Felpham Billy rode out every morn,
Horseback with Death, over the fields of corn;
Who with iron hand cuff'd, in the afternoon,
The ears of Billy's Lawyer and Dragoon.
And Cur my lawyer, and Daddy, Jack Hemp's parson,
Both went to law with Death to keep our ears on.
For how to starve Death we had laid a plot
Against his price—but Death was in the pot.
He made them pay his price, alackaday!
He knew both Law and Gospel better than they.
O that I ne'er had seen that William Blake,
Or could from Death Assassinette wake!
We thought — Alas, that such a thought could be! —
That Blake would etch for him and draw for me.
For 'twas a kind of bargain Screwmuch made
That Blake's designs should be by us display'd,
Because he makes designs so very cheap.
Then Screwmuch at Blake's soul took a long leap.
'Twas not a mouse. 'Twas Death in a disguise.
And I, alas! live to weep out my eyes.
And Death sits laughing on their monuments
On which he's written 'Received the contents.'
But I have writ — so sorrowful my thought is —
His epitaph; for my tears are aquafortis.
'Come, Artists, knock your head against this stone,
For sorrow that our friend Bob Screwmuch's gone.'
And now the Muses upon me smile and laugh
I'll also write my own dear epitaph,
And I'll be buried near a dyke

That my friends may weep as much as they like:
`Here lies Steward the Friend of all mankind;
He has not left one enemy behind.'

xxix

—For this is being a friend just in the nick,
Not when he's well, but waiting till he's sick;
He calls you to his help; be you not mov'd
Until, by being sick, his wants are prov'd.

You see him spend his soul in prophecy:
Do you believe it a confounded lie,
Till some bookseller, and the public fame,
Prove there is truth in his extravagant claim.

For 'tis atrocious in a friend you love
To tell you anything that he can't prove,
And 'tis most wicked in a Christian nation
For any man to pretend to inspiration.

xxx

Was I angry with Hayley who us'd me so ill
Or can I be angry with Felpham's old mill?
Or angry with Flaxman, or Cromek, or Stothard,
Or poor Schiavonetti, whom they to death bother'd?
Or angry with Macklin, or Boydell, or Bowyer,
Because they did not say `O what a beau ye are'?
At a friend's errors anger show,
Mirth at the errors of a foe.

xxxi

Having given great offence by writing in prose,
I'll write in verse as soft as Bartoloze.
Some blush at what others can see no crime in;
But nobody sees any harm in riming.
Dryden, in rime, cries 'Milton only plann'd':
Every fool shook his bells throughout the land.
Tom Cooke cut Hogarth down with his clean graving:
Thousands of connoisseurs with joy ran raving.
Thus, Hayley on his toilette seeing the soap,
Cries, 'Homer is very much improv'd by Pope.'
Some say I've given great provision to my foes,
And that now I lead my false friends by the nose.
Flaxman and Stothard, smelling a sweet savour,
Cry 'Blakified drawing spoils painter and engraver';
While I, looking up to my umbrella,
Resolv'd to be a very contrary fellow,
Cry, looking quite from skumference to centre:
'No one can finish so high as the original Inventor.'
Thus poor Schiavonetti died of the Cromeek—
A thing that's tied around the Examiner's neck!
This is my sweet apology to my friends,
That I may put them in mind of their latter ends.
If men will act like a maid smiling over a churn,
They ought not, when it comes to another's turn,
To grow sour at what a friend may utter,
Knowing and feeling that we all have need of butter.
False friends, fie! fie! Our friendship you shan't sever;
In spite we will be greater friends than ever.