

4th-lecture

William Blake:

William Blake was a poet, painter, visionary mystic, and engraver. During his life the prophetic message of his writings were understood by few and misunderstood by many. However Blake is now widely admired for his soulful originality and lofty imagination. The poetry of William Blake is far reaching in its scope and range of experience. The poems of William Blake can offer a profound symbolism and also a delightful childlike innocence. Whatever the inner meaning of Blake's poetry we can easily appreciate the beautiful language and lyrical quality of his poetic vision.

“To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.”

From ” Auguries of innocence “

William Blake was born in London, where he spent most of his life. His father was a successful London hosier and attracted by the doctrines of Emmanuel Swedenborg. Blake was first educated at home, chiefly by his mother. His parents encouraged him to collect prints of the Italian masters, and in 1767 sent him to Henry Pars' drawing school. From his early years, he experienced visions of angels and ghostly monks, he saw and conversed with the angel Gabriel, the Virgin Mary, and various historical figures. These memories never left him and influenced his poetry throughout his life

His early poems Blake wrote at the age of 12. However, being early apprenticed to a manual occupation, journalistic-social career was not open to him. His first book of poems, POETICAL SKETCHES, appeared in 1783 and was followed by SONGS OF INNOCENCE(1789), and SONGS OF EXPERIENCE (1794). His most famous poem, 'The Tyger', was part of his Songs of Experience. Typical for Blake's poems were long, flowing lines and violent energy, combined with aphoristic clarity and moments of lyric tenderness.

In 1790 Blake engraved THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL, a book of paradoxical aphorisms and his principal prose work. “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.” (from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell) The work expressed Blake's revolt against the established values of his time: “Prisons are built with stones of Law, brothels with bricks of Religion.” Radically he sided with the Satan in Milton's Paradise Lost and attacked the

conventional religious views in a series of aphorisms. But the poet's life in the realms of images did not please his wife who once remarked: "I have very little of Mr. Blake's company. He is always in Paradise." Some of Blake's contemporaries called him a harmless lunatic.

The Blakes moved south of the Thames to Lambeth in 1790. During this time Blake began to work on his 'prophetic books', where he expressed his lifelong concern with the struggle of the soul to free its natural energies from reason and organized religion. He wrote AMERICA: A PROPHECY (1793), THE BOOK OF URIZEN (1794), and THE SONG OF LOS (1795). Blake hated the effects of the Industrial Revolution in England and looked forward to the establishment of a New Jerusalem "in England's green and pleasant land." Between 1804 and 1818 he produced an edition of his own poem JERUSALEM with 100 engravings.

"Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of Fire."

Compare/Contrast Blake's Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience William Blake is a romantic poet who became very famous for his literary works. He was also known as an artist, who created Songs of Innocence and of Experience. Blake calls these two sets of poems, "The two contrary states of the human soul." Blake's Songs of Innocence and experience juxtapose the innocent pastoral world of childhood and in contrast an adult world of corruption and repression. The poems, "The Lamb", "The Tyger", and "The Chimney Sweepers" as a whole explores the values and limitations of two perspectives in the world. These poems fall into pairs, so the same situation can be seen from the view of innocence first and then experience. In "The lamb"

The other is dark and evil. The poem "The Tyger" starts out with a childlike speaker repeatedly asking who could of made the Tyger. "The Tyger" is a short lyric poem of twenty-four lines that asks, without giving explicit answers, how an all-perfect God responsible for innocence and goodness can be the creator of violence and evil.(Curley). In comparison with the lamb the reader can imply both were made from the same God. A quote from "The Tyger", "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" It is essential that maybe the one who made the Lamb also made the Tyger. Both poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" contrast in many ways. In the songs of innocence

the lamb is personified as being Jesus. The lamb also symbolizes all the goodness in the world. When it comes the Tyger it is viewed as the devil an evil being. The question is asked, Where did the being get the rebellious pride of a Satan, a Daedalus, or a Prometheus to defy the natural order of things and seize the fire engendering this monstrous creature? What kind of strength (“shoulder”), artistry (“art”), and force (“hand”) moulded the dreadful beauty into existence (lines 9-12)?(Curley). The readers opinions can vary, one can think maybe God did create both, or the Devil created the Tyger and God created the lamb. This is what makes the poem “The Tyger” so complex because it does not give an actual .He placed both poems in his famous collections of poetry, one in the songs of innocence and the other in the songs of experience. In the poem “The chimney Sweeper” from the songs of innocence introduces innocent young chimney sweeps being utilized and oppressed. These kids being utilized are unaware of the oppression. The speaker reports of his mother passing away and his father selling him. A quote from the poem states, “I sweep & in soot I sleep.” Basically this line describes the nature in which the speaker lives in. According to Michael Mc Clard, “Through the first two lines, readers quickly learn that this chimney sweeper has no one to nurture or guide him. The details of this boy’s life are heart wrenching, but Blake exaggerates nothing.” (Mc Clard). The speaker then turns over to his friend little Tom Dacre. Tom Dacre dreams about many other chimney sweeps being locked in black coffins and then an Angel set them all free. The reader can interpret the black coffins symbolizing their death. According to Linda Freedman, “The malicious fiction that suffering in this world is relieved by salvation in the next.” (Freedman). At the end of the Poem the speaker states, “And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy, He’d have God for his father & never want joy.” The reader can fully understand if he is obedient then God will become his father and will accept him in the afterlife.

(from ‘Jerusalem’ in Milton, 1804-1808)

In 1800 Blake was taken up by the wealthy William Hayley, poet and patron of poets. The Blakes lived in Hayley’s house at Felpham in Sussex, staying there for three years. At Felpham Blake worked on MILTON: A POEM IN TWO BOOKS, TO JUSTIFY THE WAYS OF GOD TO MEN. It was finished and engraved between 1803 and 1808. In 1809 Blake had a commercially unsuccessful exhibition

at the shop once owned by his brother. However, economic problems did not depress him, but he continued to produce energetically poems, aphorisms, and engravings. “The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction,” he wrote.

Independent through his life, Blake left no debts at his death on August 12, 1827. He was buried in an unmarked grave at the public cemetery of Bunhill Fields. Wordsworth’s verdict after Blake’s death reflected many opinions of the time: “There was no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott.” Blake’s influence grew through Pre-Raphaelites and W.B. Yeats especially in Britain. His interest in legend was revived with the Romantics’ rediscovery of the past, especially the Gothic and medieval. In the 1960s Blake’s work was acclaimed by the Underground movement. T.S. Eliot wrote in his essay on Blake that “the concentration resulting from a framework of mythology and theology and philosophy is one of the reasons why Dante is a classic and Blake only a poet of genius.”

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Songs of Innocence

Full Book Analysis

Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) juxtapose the innocent, pastoral world of childhood against an adult world of corruption and repression; while such poems as “The Lamb” represent a meek virtue, poems like “The Tyger” exhibit opposing, darker forces. Thus the collection as a whole explores the value and limitations of two different perspectives on the world. Many of the poems fall into pairs, so that the same situation or problem is seen through the lens of innocence first and then experience. Blake does not identify himself wholly with either view; most of the poems are dramatic—that is, in the voice of a speaker other than the poet himself. Blake stands outside innocence and experience, in a distanced position from which he hopes to be able to recognize and correct the fallacies of both. In particular, he pits himself against despotic authority, restrictive morality, sexual repression, and institutionalized religion; his great insight is into the way these separate modes of control work together to squelch what is most holy in human beings.

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The *Songs of Innocence* dramatize the naive hopes and fears that inform the lives of children and trace their transformation as the child grows into adulthood. Some of the poems are written from the perspective of children, while others are about

children as seen from an adult perspective. Many of the poems draw attention to the positive aspects of natural human understanding prior to the corruption and distortion of experience. Others take a more critical stance toward innocent purity: for example, while Blake draws touching portraits of the emotional power of rudimentary Christian values, he also exposes—over the heads, as it were, of the innocent—Christianity’s capacity for promoting injustice and cruelty.

The *Songs of Experience* work via parallels and contrasts to lament the ways in which the harsh experiences of adult life destroy what is good in innocence, while also articulating the weaknesses of the innocent perspective (“The Tyger,” for example, attempts to account for real, negative forces in the universe, which innocence fails to confront). These latter poems treat sexual morality in terms of the repressive effects of jealousy, shame, and secrecy, all of which corrupt the ingenuousness of innocent love. With regard to religion, they are less concerned with the character of individual faith than with the institution of the Church, its role in politics, and its effects on society and the individual mind. Experience thus adds a layer to innocence that darkens its hopeful vision while compensating for some of its blindness.

The style of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* is simple and direct, but the language and the rhythms are painstakingly crafted, and the ideas they explore are often deceptively complex. Many of the poems are narrative in style; others, like “The Sick Rose” and “The Divine Image,” make their arguments through symbolism or by means of abstract concepts. Some of Blake’s favorite rhetorical techniques are personification and the reworking of Biblical symbolism and language. Blake frequently employs the familiar meters of ballads, nursery rhymes, and hymns, applying them to his own, often unorthodox conceptions. This combination of the traditional with the unfamiliar is consonant with Blake’s perpetual interest in reconsidering and reframing the assumptions of human thought and social behavior.

Previous section “**The Sick Rose**”