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BLAKE'S SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND SONGS OF EXPERIENCE:
A STUDY OF THEMES AND SYMBOLS

SHOW LI-CHUAN

ABSTRACT

William Blake (1757-1827) lived through the period of the industrial revolution and the rise of Romanticism, but he was unique and had his own style, leaving himself to the world of mysticism and metaphysics.

Blake's poetry is as beautiful and real as pictures, perhaps because Blake was an artist and a poet at the same time. His thoughts and emotions were always beyond his time; as a result, his contemporaries paid little attention to his works, which became highly appreciated only by the generations of the 20th Century. Readers of this century understand that behind Blake's simple language is a precious truth that lives forever. They laud him as the seer and prophet of the time.

Blake felt that "innocence" and "experience" are processes which the human soul must go through in the course of growing. In the stage of innocence, mortals unite with God in a world that is bright, promising and beautiful; but in the stage of experience, mortals find themselves separated from god in a world full of deceits, hypocrisy and evil. In a simple language, Blake depicted the two contrary states of the human soul with an attempt to seek release from the mind-forged manacles resulting from the industrial revolution. His
ultimate goal was to purify human nature and bring it back to a state of innocence.

Today, the rapid development of industry and technology has had an impact on human souls, and impact that is thousands of times larger than that of Blake's time. It is for this reason that we cannot help but applaud Blake's wisdom and foreknowledge in his *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. 
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I. Blake's Life and Works:

William Blake, born in November 1757 and dying in August 1827, lived in a period when the economy, politics and culture of England were undergoing tremendous renovation. Therefore, it is understandable that Blake strongly reacted to the impact of those violent changes on his time. Yet, Blake can be seen as one who surpasses history to live in a world of his own creativity and imagination.¹

Readers today must admit and accept the fact that there were two different Blakes. One was a sympathizer with revolution, showing concern over the improvement of the social order and the abolition of evils rooted deeply in society, criticizing the old-fashioned system, hoping that the value of his own humanism would be recognized and approved by the vulgar, rigorous and cruel world in which he was living. The other was a mystic who was fond of reading the Bible, separating himself from the various secular development of his time, dining and conversing with the prophets and saints of the classics, refusing to compromise with what he believed and what he had seen, and painting the portraits of the dead heroes of ancient times in order to create his own literary mythology.

Some of Blake's opponents thought that he was completely crazy but many of Blake's disciples regarded him as a saint. Blake's easy-going yet emotional temper was very well known but his rich literary talent was undeniable.

Blake was born and grew up at 20 Broad Street (now Brodwick Street) in London. When he was a child, he was already noted for his perceptive abilities and inspiration. He told others some of the fantasies he had seen in his
imagination. Such amazing reports included: God propping his head out of a window; a tree full of angels; and the prophet Ezekid sitting in the shade of a tree. It was for this reason that his haberdasher father allowed him to go to the Henry Pars' to study painting in 1967 instead of going to a regular school. He later studied for a time at the school of the Royal Academy of Arts. In 1772, he was apprenticed for six years to a well-known engraver, James Basire, and seriously studied engraving.

In 1782, he married Catherine Boucher, daughter of a market gardener from Battersea in the south of the River Thames. Boucher was then illiterate but she was good at drawing and most important, she was an ideal wife. Blake taught her to read and help him in his engraving and printing. Blake lived on the earnings from engraving illustrations for several publishing companies. For a time, he and James Parker jointly opened a printing company but Blake was apparently not a successful businessman.

In 1800, Blake moved to a cottage in Felpham, on the Sussex seacoast under the patronage of the wealthy poet, biographer and amateur of the arts, William Hayley. Blake lived in Felpham for three years. Feeling that he was controlled by Hayley, Blake returned to London, where he spent the remainder of his life.  

In London, Blake found living was even more difficult. He and his wife had to live a humble life, depending on financial aid from some of Blake's loyal friends and admirers. In the early 19th Century, Blake attempted to achieve some fame and financial rewards from some of his publications—colorful illustrated books composed and printed by him. This effort failed. Nevertheless, that period of economic depression was probably the most glorious period of Blake's literary and artistic creation.

In his old years, Blake's fame grew and this enabled him
to attract some enthusiastic, young disciples who called themselves the Ancients. With their help, particularly that of John Linnell, Blake and his family were able to survive. Blake also received more jobs, such as making illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

It may be surprising to hear that Blake was not known as a poet even though he was a life-long writer who had started writing poetry at the age of twenty. *The Poetic Sketches* is the only work of Blake published in a conventional way. This was Blake's earliest work. The first volume of another book, the *French Revolution*, was scheduled to be published in twelve volumes, but while it was typeset by the publisher Johnson, it was never published.

All of the other works of Blake that are known to exist were published by Blake himself. They were not typeset. The words and illustrations were the joint effort of Blake and his wife. In fact, Blake inaugurated the method of publication he used for all his later original works, a procedure he had partly invented. He drew the text and illustrations as a total pictorial design with an acid-proof substance directly on the copper plate, then applied acid so that the design was left in relief. With this plate he printed a page, which he later colored with water colors by hand and bound with the other pages to make up a volume. The procedure of making the plates was laborious and time-consuming, and Blake struck of very few copies of his works.

The first of these works was *Songs of Innocence*, printed in 1789 and quickly followed by the *Book of Thel*, printed in the same year. Other great illustrated books included *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–93), *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). *America* (1793), *Songs of Experience* (1794), *Europe* (1794), *Urizen* (1794), *The Song of Los* (1795), *The Four Zoas* (1797), *Milton* (1808) and *Jerusalem*
Blake's works, looking at from all angles, are critical of rational, sophisticatedly organized, systematicized, and restrictive ways of living. Blake felt that such ways of living were the product of science and of Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Isac Newton's rationism. All through his works, Blake praised a life which was full of imagination, humanity, creativity and vitality. These, he noted, are the elements which drive us to continue making great efforts to secure our real humanity. Most objectively speaking, Blake's works broadcast the Gospels in a most stimulative and aesthetic way.

Obviously, Blake's poetry needs repeated reading and much thought in order to understand its real meaning. Some poems even remain obscure after frequent, careful readings. Although his poetry is difficult to read, it still provides a touching and wonderful experience. This is why Blake is one of the greatest lyrical poets of the English literature. Once one has read his unique and exciting lines, one will never forget them. No other poet has expressed himself in the same way that Blake has. Blake is unique; his style is outstanding.

II. The Time and Influence of Blake

The French Revolution broke out in 1789. Songs of Innocence was published in the same year. Like his contemporaries, Blake was greatly influenced by the revolution.

After the storming of the Bastille, Blake no longer played on the flute of the piper but switched to the trumpet instead. The repression of his emotion since childhood was transformed into cruelty, courtesy, and doubt. He thought if there were no conspiracy between kings and the priest,
which he considered the cause of the fall of the world, or if the world were to be changed into the paradise simply through the breaking of "this heavy chain", the natural world would then be inherently good and inherently divine. The hidden spark of delight would then burst into flame.5

Blake filled his poetry with prophecy. Songs of Innocence promotes the merger of life and religion. Such an academic concept leads to a valueless recognition of the natural world. There is therefore no doubt that the Revolution of 1789 was the time when Blake changed his concept of the value of actual life.

Blake grew up in London. Three years of staying at Felpham did not at all change his London living style. Thus, he was entirely different from his Romantic successors or the gifted Byron or Shelly. The structure of London's streets and communities, and Lambeth, Islington and Primrose Hill became important parts of his symbolic world. Though dominated by his imagination, Blake, however did not forget the commercial, miserable, and unethical nature of London. He lived through the whole course of the industrial revolution. He felt sorry for the misery of the chimney sweepers, harlots, young miners and factory workers of London. Then when the entire agricultural society violently broke down as a result of industrial revolution, he never denied the bitter toil and labor of the country farmers and workers.

Blake was sensitive to social change. He was completely on the side of the working class against the exploiters. Among the most important changes in the decades of the late 18th Century and the early 19th Century were the revolution in the economic order and the cultural renaissance which extended to the areas of philosophy, theology and racism. We cannot, of course, limit the period of the industrial revolution to 1760-1830. The cultural renaissance can then
be seen as the origin of the entire change of the economic system from feudalism to capitalism. Industrial developments formed the social structure which Blake was encountering.

Blake felt that mechanic was obviously not the proper reference for his writings. He sighed over the damages of the good-old-days country art and regarded the rise of mechanic as the end of art. He realized that so-called industrialization meant a replacement of the four-season natural country life with mechanical robot life.

Other people who were born a little later than Blake also laboriously worked for the establishment of a new artistic area but their achievements fell behind Blake's. Blake's achievements were also more lasting. He had worked for twenty years before William Wordsworth met Samuel Coleridge. When Blake died in 1827, Wordsworth and Coleridge's stimulative strength also disappeared. It is similar to the time when Keats and Shelley died and Byron wondered whether it was worthwhile to continue to devote his life to the glorification of free and natural life, which seemed to be so remoted. Blake was a genius. He was a born artist. Though he passed away silently, his works will always be remembered by the generations to come.

III. Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience:

*Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were composed by Blake separately. *Songs of Innocence* was etch-printed in 1789, five years earlier than *Songs of Experience*.

Blake was a painter, and also a poet. *Songs of Innocence* was illustrated with pictures he designed through the process of copper-plate relief. This technique was first used in the poems "There is No Natural Religion" and "All Religions are One" in 1788. These beautiful designs were as full of meaning
as the texts of Blake's lyrics.

Four poems "The School Boy", "The Voice of the Ancient Bard", "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" were originally included in *Songs of Innocence*, but because they were beyond the state of "innocence", they were later collected in *Songs of Experience*.

*Songs of Innocence* contains lyric poems which depict country life, interesting affairs of childhood, flowers, birds, lambs and shepherds. Through the imagination of the poet, a beautiful world as seen by children is recreated. To Blake, a child's world is full of imagination, naivety and purity. There has been moral decline in this world. Blake arranged in his poems a desired god. He created an image of a simple, innocent child needing protection. With the love of a kind father and a protective God, the child sees everything bright and harmonious.

Blake regarded childhood as the most important part of human nature because childhood has a direct, primitive experience. Therefore, *Songs of Innocence* is suitable not only for children but also for adults who wish to return to the innocent state and to be free from the pollution of reasoning and knowledge.

In the prologue to *Songs of Innocence*, we learn that the poems are written for every child to hear and to read. Although the poet is childless, his love for children and his understanding of "innocence" are seen everywhere in the lines.

*Songs of Experience* was begun in 1789 and completed in 1794. It was printed with a relief process similar to that of *Songs of Innocence*. The delight of innocence is replaced by the misery of experience. The poet no longer possesses the beautiful childhood world and what comes up to him is a world of evil and misfortune which tears apart the world of innocence and purity. Blake's experience of hypocritical,
cruel and sinful world can be seen in *Songs of Experience*. The running joy of the children is damaged by the selfishness which comes when children grow up. Self indulgence and passion are restrained by the false priests of religion and social boundage. The government only supports the conventional interests and ignores the misery and needs of people.

When Blake released these two works in 1794, he added a subtitle "Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul." The remark "contrary" is an important foundation of Blake's thought. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793), Blake claimed that "without contraries is no progression." In this way, children should grow up and "innocence" should come under "experience". The tame lamb is thus replaced by an angry and temperamental tiger.

In the prologue to *Songs of Experience*, Blake exhibits himself as an ancient bard but in *Songs of Innocence* he was a piper. The piper only plays for the present joy but the bard must praise and tell of everything with his prophetic mouth. The inspiration of the piper comes from the imagination of the cloud-riding child while the inspiration of the bard comes from the Holy Spirit which walks through the ancient world. In *Songs of Experience* mankind has a "lapsed soul", which no longer has the innocence and naivety of children. Mankind is bound by excessive rationalism and controlled by time and space. The bard tries his best to call on mankind to unite with God.

"O Earth, O Earth, return! 
Arise from out the dewy grass; 
Night is worn, 
And the morn 
Rises from the slumberous mass."

"Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor
The watery shore
Is giv'n thee till the break of day."
(K 210)

Mankind, however, cannot answer the "holy word" of the poet and Blake's regret that mankind cannot answer this call can be seen in "Earth's Answer". Mankind encounters social, religious, and especially psychological oppression. All this oppression is like the "mind-forged manacles" described in the poem "London" in Songs of Experience:

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.
(K 216)

Both Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience are written in simple, monosyllable words. Songs of Innocence records a childish sound which later contrasts with the wisdom of Songs of Experience. The simple words also depict the contrast of naive childhood and ugly adulthood. Mysticism, humanity and symbolism fill both works. Songs of Innocence is full of youthful delight and admiration of life, while Songs of Experience is covered with melancholy and mystery, indicating the poet's awareness of evil. Both Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience contain Blake's philosophy—a mixture, and coexistence of paradox and harmony, badness and goodness, body and soul, heaven and hell.
CHAPTER 2

THE THEME OF SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND
SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

I. The Identification of Man and God and Their Separation:

The identification of man and God is one of the major themes in Songs of Innocence. To Blake, God is not only all mighty but also a "universal man". God not only exists by himself but also forms one body with the universe. In "The Divine Image" in Songs of Innocence, God is called "the human form divine" or "Our father dear," and man is known as "his child." Thus, the identification of God and man is aptly described by the relationship of father and son.¹

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
In God our father dear:
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
In man, his child and care.

Pray to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

(K·117)

Man's real attributes are God's, and the wonder of God is also possessed by man:

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity, a human face:
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

(K 117)
Because man possesses some of God's nature—mercy, pity, peace and love, we can see God in man himself.  

Where Mercy, Love, & Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too.

(K 117)

In "The Lamb", the child, the lamb and God are one. "The Lamb" is put in the form of question and answer. The child's questioning of the lamb is just like the adult's questioning of a child. The most important concept in this poem is the deep feeling of recognition of the questioner and the question. That is to say, the child is the lamb and the lamb is the child. More profoundly speaking, in Stanza 2, we discover that the child, the lamb and God are one.

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.

("The Lamb", K 115)

"The Shepherd", another poem in Songs of Innocence clearly explains the concept of the identification of God and man.

The shepherd is obviously a representative of God. When the lamb knows that he is near, peace and harmony are felt. The shepherd is both the caring one and the cared for one, and is cared for by both Jesus Christ and by the herd. Thus, God is both a caring one and a lamb at the same time, while
man is both a lamb and a caring one in one.

How sweet is the Shepherd'a sweet lot!
From the morn to the evening he strays;
He shall follow his sheep all the day,
And his tongue shall be filled with praise.

(K 118)

In "The Human Abstract" of Songs of Experience, the abstract reason of man creates for him a world full of perplexity. In the world, man separates himself from the omnipresent God. In his chaotic world, man no longer shares an identification with the "universal man" and he loses the "divine essences" mentioned in "The Divine Image". To Blake, man's loss of his identification with the universal man represents his fall.

The divine virtues of man---mercy, pity, peace and love---are replaced by unitarism, cruelty, conflict and hypocrisy. Pity and mercy become things which drive people to poverty and endless lust, and peace finds its origins in fear:

Pity would be no more,
If we did not make somebody Poor;
And Mercy no more could be,
If all were as happy as we;

And mutual fear brings peace,
Till the selfish loves increase;

(K 217)

Finally, the power of human reason paves the way for the rise of hypocrisy and deceit, like a tree growing with fake fruits, which initially taste as sweet as Eve's apple
but in the end are mere piles of trash. And it is in this tree that nests the raven which is a symbol of death.  

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,  
Ruddy and sweet to eat;  
And the Raven his nest has made  
In its thickest shade.  

(K 217)

"The Human Abstract" is the central theme of Songs of Experience, just as "The Divine Image" is the central theme of Songs of Innocence.

II. The Two Contrary States of the Human Soul:

In the poems of Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience, we can clearly see that a new born human soul grows up from the stage of complete naivety to a stage of full experience.

In general, the children of Songs of Innocence are too naive and do not know there is misfortune. Blake depicts in the simplest language what a poor, little child will think of in his little mind. In poverty, the child still lives happily because he does not really know what is poverty. Blake's adoption of a child's language serves to demonstrate the purity and innocence of children. However, in Songs of Experience, the child gradually becomes sophisticated. He not only becomes aware of his misfortunes but also attempts to persuade himself to accept the unfortunate facts of poverty.

An overly simple and naive child who does not know what poverty is and a sophisticated child who accepts poverty are representatives of a human soul developing to maturity.
A. "The Chimney Sweeper":

"The Chimney Sweeper" is not like Blake's other poems in Songs of Innocence. It presents neither a pastoral world nor an ivory-tower world, but the humble and inhuman life of the chimney sweeper.

Because a chimney is usually very narrow, children hired to clean chimneys have to be small, about six years old. Most chimney sweepers are treated even worse than animals. They get up in the dark and work till noon. They look for customers on the streets. When the day is done they carry their heavy bags of soot and return to the attic where they sleep. During the night they lie on the bags of soot.4

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry "'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"
So your chimney I sweep & in soot I sleep

(K 117)

Although Blake depicts the miserable life of his time, the young chimney sweeper in Songs of Innocence still retains his innocence and naive nature, "even in the midst of such oppression."5 A naive child does not know what is toil when he does not know that he is living miserably.

In struggling for survival, how can an innocent chimney sweeper lives as happily as other lucky children?

The answer is his dream.

In the dream, all the chimney sweepers are released from the dark world and the coffins of black. They laugh and dance in a green meadow. This is a typical scene from Blake's world of innocence.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open'd the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun;

The naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

(K 118)

In *Songs of Experience*, the chimney sweeper files his strong complaint against the society in which Blake was living. Children in *Songs of Experience* differ from those of *Songs of Innocence*. They know they are living in a poor situation, and therefore they cry in melancholy voices. They know what is love and they feel the need to be loved.

Careful readers may be aware that, except for the first three lines of "The Chimney Sweeper" from the *Songs of Experience*, the remainder lines describe the narration of a young sweeper. To prove the child is sophisticated, Blake even lets the child say something beyond his age.

The first half of "The Chimney Sweeper" is written in the past tense and the latter half in the present tense. This serves to demonstrate the idea that the child's agony and toil exist in both the past and the present.

The experienced child is completely aware of the condition of the world in which he is living. He does not seek refuge in a world of dreams but appears in the street crying sadly.

B. "Holy Thursday"

"Holy Thursday" describes a group of London charity school boys going to St. Paul's Cathedral to celebrate the Ascension of Jesus during the Holy Thursday.
In Songs of Innocence, the innocent orphans are seen having clean faces in contrast to their dirty faces on ordinary days. They also wear their best clothes, which are so beautiful that they make themselves the flowers of London or the lambs of the pasture. The older boys, holding their bartons, are like shepherd boys holding their clubs. The sweet orphans are led to the church by their leaders as if they were lambs being led to the green pasture.

Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green,
Grey headed beadles walk'd before with wans as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames' waters flow.

O what a multitude they seemed, these flowers of London town!
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own.
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lamb,

(K 122)

In the end, the songs and praises of the boys send out a "mighty wind" toward the Heaven.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among.

(K 122)
E. D. Hirsch thinks that at this moment Blake's imagination is fully transferred to the New Testament's "Book of Acts" and of "Revelation". His attention is diverted to "the voice of song like a mighty wind", just as the day of Pentecost in the "Book of Acts" echoes with celestial sound.\(^6\)

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

(Acts 2:1-2)

In "Holy Thursday" of the Songs of Experience, the songs of the children are covered over by the angry voice of the narrator. To his inner ear the songs praising St. Peter are like a trembling cry. The narrator ironically attacks the existence of the ugly fact of poverty "in a rich and fruitful land."

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

(K 212)

The narrator at the same time angrily reproaches the cruelty of society and of charitable affairs. Here the charity school boys become scapegoats for an unfair society:

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babies reduced to misery,
The theme of "Holy Thursday" of Songs of Experience is obvious. The children are already aware of their situation.

The tone here is even more affirmative than the poems previously mentioned. Children are not only aware of their misfortune and poverty, but also become a little pessimistic. They know misery and poverty because they occupy their whole lives. They are neglected by Nature:

And their sun does never shine,
And their fields are bleak & bare,
And their ways are fill'd with thorns;
It is eternal winter there.

The children here lose their courage to challenge Nature. They desperately and calmly admit that the world in which they are living will be an eternal winter.

III. The Child's Inherited Possession of the Divine Imagination:

In Songs of Innocence, Blake felt that all children are associated with divine imagination; and they are the "poetic genius" in whom "all religions are one." It is like what William Wordsworth had said in his Ode: Intimations of Immortality that children are the omnipotent "seer blest" and "mighty prophet."  

Innocent children who inherit poetic talent can bring along with them joy and trust. Since the essence of poetry can bring "divine vision", the so-called "divine vision" is
thus known as a kind of recognition that is more perfect than the present world. The metaphysical world of Songs of Innocence is a pastoral heaven, and the delight and trust of the children come from the sympathy and care of their human guardian.

Although their human guardian cannot effectively help mankind leave its agony and disease, the guardian can endlessly safeguard the trust and delight of children. Although God weeps for men, he also gives them blessings.8

The human guardian gives the child a "Divine Vision." This is typical of several of the Songs of Innocence poems. Blake first presents the miserable conditions of the world, then provides a loving guardian for the child, who will take the child to peace, and then gives him a "Divine Vision."

In "The Chimney Sweeper", the sweeper is subject to exploitation. Still he acts as a guardian to little Tom Dacre:

Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

(K 117)

Such concern and care do not in fact alter the pathetic plight of Tom but it does fill Tom with peace.

And so he was quiet, & that very night
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!

(K 117)

Tom believes that the concern and care of the chimney sweeper must come from God, who looks after both the earth and the heaven:
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

(K 118)

In "The Little Black Boy" there is a description of a
black child victimized by the realistic society:

But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

(K 125)

The black boy, later, feels both warmth and delight from
the love and care of his mother, who points to the rise of the
sun in the east, saying that God is there to send out his
light and heat, to see all living things grow, to hope that
mankind will know how to take this grace,⁹ that is,
blessing of the eternal God.

She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And pointing to the east, began to say:

"Look on the rising sun: there God does live,
And gives his light, and gives his heat away;

And thus I say to little English boy:
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,

I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear
To lean in joy upon our father's knee;

(K125)

"Holy Thursday" describes a group of charity school
students led by the "grey-headed beadles" going to St.
Paul Catherdral. In the church, the leader sits opposite
to the children. The church ceremony then transforms the reality of the church pews into rows of seats in Heaven, which recalls those of "The Book of Revelation":

The children walking two & two,
in red & blue & green,
Grey headed bearlkes walk'd before with wands
as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they
like Thames' waters flow.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven
the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thunderings
the seats of heaven among.
Beneath them sit the aged men,
wise guardians of the poor;

(K 121-22)

From the beginning of "Nurse's Song" in Songs of Innocence, we see a group of children, worrying about nothing, playing in the land of joy. The empathy of the nurse for the children enables her to enter into a state of innocence. At this moment, the nurse feels peace and her worries and melancholy for the misery and danger of this world are still.

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And everything else is still.

(K 121)
Like the nurse, the old folk in "The Echoing Green" also obtains his childlike delight through the memory of his childhood.

"Such, such were the joyous
When we all, girls and boys,
In our youth time were seen
On the Echoing Green."

(K 116)

Like Wordsworth, Blake found through his childhood memories intimations of immortality. The old folks' memory of childhood delight represents the regaining of the spring of eternity and rebirth. Old John is able to laugh away care and melancholy. This does not mean that melancholy itself becomes insignificant, but that Old John, like the nurse, finds peace and harmony through the laugh of the children. It is also an echoing of the recollection of childhood experiences, which underlie the promise of eternity.  

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And everything else is still.

("Nurse's Song" from Innocence, K 121)

To Blake, innocence is a kind of happiness, and is the natural flow of delight of the imaginative power of children. Innocence can be found not only in the world of children, but also in the world of adults with the aid of imagination and memory.  

24
IV. Happy Pastoral and Fallen City:

"The Echoing Green" Presents a child's happy, pastoral life. The old folks, like the nurse, look at the children at play and are reminded of their joyful childhood.

Blake successfully fuses the prophetic future with viewable objects, tracing the life cycle of human beings. 12

Stanza 1 of "Echoing Green" depicts a rising sun in the east which symbolizes the age of the youth. Stanza 3 speaks of a setting sun in the west which signifies the decline of the prime years; the stanza in between the two represents the middle age of man in the world. This is exactly the life span of people. Watching the children at play, the old folks say:

"Such, such were the joys
When we all, girls and boys,
In our youth time were seen
On the Echoing Green."

(K 116)

The game ends at the last stanza:

Sport no more seen
On the darkening Green

But, in the cycle of life, an end only signifies another beginning. Thus, the setting sun is also the promise of sun's new dawning.

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.

25 (K 116)
Blake was born in London; he is one of those "born here, grew here" people. London is the only city Blake really knew. Except for living for three years in Felpham from 1800 to 1803, Blake spent his entire life in London. He loved London because this was the place where he spent most of his life. However, he was also depressed by the chimneys of the city and by the moral corruption of the residents. Therefore, he wrote a poem called "London" for the Songs of Experience. This was Blake's special protest against the industrial civilization which he thought was disadvantageous to human life.

No doubt "London" is Blake's best poem. It describes the urban conditions of London, and especially stresses the moral decline and misery of city folks. The poem discusses neither the mass of the people nor the industrial revolution, but criticizes the life of certain privileged classes, and the mind-forged manacles of those people. It opposes all kinds of tyrannical rules and unnatural oppression. The city of London is a symbol of the deluded "human brain" which leads to the fall of mankind. 13

In "London", the sorrow and sad news the poet sees and hears comes from the oppression of a distorted mind. It is man's wits to create churches, monarchy, politics and marriage which are all institutions of repression. All the sorrows of London originate from these man-made establishments.

If there were no church offering a commitment of God to compensate for the existence of inequality, there would not be young chimney sweepers:

"Where are thy father & mother? say?"
They are both gone up to the church to pray.
("The Chimney Sweeper" from Experience K 212)
If there were no monarchs to start wars from their own selfishness, there would not be kingdoms and there would not be tyrannical rules. If there was no marriage, there would not be unsatisfied desires, and hence no harlots.  

In every cry of every Man,  
In every infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every blackening Church appalls;  
And the hapless Soldies's sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlot's curse

Blasts the new-born Infant's tear,  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

The sadness of this poem is the unreasonable state of fallen man. Behind the irony and reproach of this poem hides Blake's ideals and confidence in changing man's spiritual state in a certain way. That is, to unlock the mind-forged manacles which distort the human mind, these manacles are marriage, the church, and kingship. In this way, "London" thus becomes a poem satirizing society, calling for rebellion against the social system as well as for political and social revolution.

Blake was upset that London was over-industrialized, which robbed him of the ability to locate the green pathes he was familiar with. He regarded himself as a pastoral man.
After bright, shining childhood came the miserable adulthood. For Blake, because of his innocence and naive nature, a pastoral man will not be lost in the satanic mills. To him, the hell of experience is only a running wheel of life, and the everlasting purity of the soul will revive when one's destiny comes to an end. Suffering after one's fall will eventually pave the way for a return to paradise.
CHAPTER 3

MAJOR SYMBOL IN BLAKE'S SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

Although the form and diction of William Blake's poetry is as simple as children songs, in its meaning and imagery, it is actually as complicate as the Gospels of Christ. In order to understand Blake's poetry, we must study it carefully, and reading it from all angles; as Blake said: "To see the world in a grain of sand." Glechner agrees that to understand Blake's poetry, one needs "to observe the reactions of various characters to the same symbolic act, object or character." 1

The mother in Songs of Innocence is symbolic; her eternal protection of the child is the major image of the state of innocence. In "Infant of Joy", the mother intimately talks with and looks after her baby. The speech and joyous laughter of the baby not only originates in Heaven, but also symbolizes the everlasting love of the mother. In "The Little Black Boy", the innocent and naive little black boy is thinking of a remote world where bright and joyous scenes are found. All this comes from the teaching of the mother.

"The beadle's wand" appears very often in Blake's poetry. In Stanza 1 of "Holy Thursday" of Songs of Innocence, the beadle's wand represents authority. Due to relations with the church, it also represents the authority of religion, or of restrained actions, which force children to act according to the rules but not according to their free will and interests. The beadle's wand is as white as snow. This hints that the artificial purity and lack of concern for morality contrast with the passion, vitality, innocence and
naivety of youth. At least, it hints that the impure concepts of the world come in contrast with the free will of Blake. But all this strongly denotes a world of experience.

Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience are the most interesting and touching poems of Blake. Blake promoted the idea of innocence and experience. He thought that the innocent world and the world of experience jointly form a meaningful society but that "without contraries" there will be "no progress". To Blake, imaginative power is sacred to people. Like both psychologists of the past and present and mystics, Blake hoped that readers could exercise an imaginative power similar to his own in order to observe, to create, and—for its ultimate goal—to return to innocence. Only in this way can we really understand the deepest meaning of the imagery of Blake's poetry.

I. The Lamb and The Tiger:

The world of the lamb differs from that of the tiger. So are their characteristics. In reality, we all know that the appearance and features of the lamb and the tiger are entirely different. The lamb is gentle and tame, while the tiger is violent and cruel.

In "The Lamb" from Songs of Innocence, the world there is a typically innocent world. It is a world with clear-water springs, tender grasses and tender voice of the lamb. It is like the valley in "Nurse's Songs" which echoes with joyful sound of the children.

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life & bid thee feed,
By the stream & o'er the mead;
...Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!

("The Lamb", K115)

"The Lamb" contains only two stanzas: the first tells of a child questioning the lamb. The poem embodies an important idea that all the child's questions are in a deep sense identical. The poem stresses the happiness of being innocent, the tenderness and gentleness of God. However, when an adult reads the poem, he will absolutely understand that his happiness comes from an atonement, which is overlooked by both the child and the innocent person. This idea recalls "Infant Joy" and "Nurse's Song"—that life itself is delightful and kind, that the fall of Nature echoes with the tender voices of lambs, just as the sound of the children echoes in the valley.

"The Tyger" is probably the most famous poem of Blake's. In "The Tyger", a vigorously energetic tiger is being created and described. The process of the creation and the poet's search for the gifted creator are ingeniously fuse together. First, the fiery eyes of the tiger remind the poet of the fire stolen by Prometheus for mankind.

In what distant deeps of skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

(K 214)

Second, the heart of the tiger causes the poet to think of Hephaestus, who is well-known for his skillful hands which make everything. (Hephaestus is usually painted as one who is wearing his working clothes and holding a hammer.)
And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? what dread feet?

(K 214)

The head of the tiger is made by Thor, the holder of hammer and the god of ironsmith. 3

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp

(K 215)

The shocking thunder storm and lightning remind the poet of God's creation of the thunder and lightning, just like his creation of his beautiful world. 4 Thus, the poet believes that only God is able to create this dreadful tiger. In Stanza 5 of "The Tyger", the smile of God confirms this idea:

When the stars threw upon their spears,
And water's heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

(K 215)

The greatness of this poem is its exhibition of the unique nature of a lyric poet, who can at the same time fashion the most vivid but simple and the most complicated language. The meaning of "The Tyger" is even richer than that of "The Lamb", not because of the difficult language in the early stanzas but because of such daring and bold diction as "forest of the night".
The experience world of "The Tyger" begins with the "forest of the night." The night and the forest are signs of danger, anger, darkness, mistake and repression to Blake. In the "Nurse's Song" from *Innocence* Blake had used "night" to represent the coming of the world of experience.

E. D. Hirsch gives a unique but powerful definition to the symbol of the forest:

"Forests, on the other hand, suggests tall straight forms, a world that for all its terror has the orderliness of the tiger's stripes or Blake's perfectly balanced verses. The phrase for such an animal and such a world is "fearful symmetry," and it would be a critical error to give preponderance either to that terror or that beauty."  

"The Tyger" is composed in the form of a question without answer. In this style, we can find many interesting things. The questions the narrator asks are mostly fundamental questions. The answers are reserved and when an answer is given, a series of questions appear. The formation of each question is like an answer, while the formation of an answer is just like the question. The two, however, are not connected. Therefore, the complicity of the poetry lies on the duality of rhetorics. The line "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" is the climax of the poem. Blake wanted to know the answer, but he wanted his readers to find the answer themselves.

"The Tyger" is full of violence and terror, but "The Lamb" is full of quietness and peace. In fact, in *Songs of Innocence*, there is no cruelty and terror. In "Night" there is enough pain and tears, but they will be overcome in the end
because they lack eternal truth and meaning. The lion on the "Night" finally becomes a lovely protector. In "Eternity", it lies with the lamb. Hirsch points out:

...while Innocence acknowledge tigerness, it entertains two reassuring ideas about it: that it is temporary and transcended, and that it is directly opposite to true holiness, which consists entirely of the lamb-like virtue of holiness, which consists entirely of the lamb-like virtue of Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love."6

There are two thoughts in "The Tyger". One states that the terror of life will be surpassed. Here the poet opposes the lamb lying with the tiger because they are both eternal. God creates a lamb and a tiger at the same time. The tiger and the lamb are two extreme animals. "The Lamb" affirms the mercy, sympathy and love of God, while "The Tyger" transforms human nature into a state of cruelty, vitality, and conflict.7 "The Lamb" presents an innocent obedience. "The Tyger" displays the activities of the world of experience.

II. Life and Death:

"The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" together form two long ballads of life and death. The poems were originally written for Songs of Innocence by Blake in 1793 and were included in Songs of Experience the following year. The poems present their themes of innocence through a primitive individual. The reason for including them in Experience is probably because of the beginning stanza of "The Little Girl Lost":

34
In futurity
In Prophetic see
That the earth from sleep,
(Grave the sentence deep)

Shall arise and seek
For her maker meek:
And the desert wild
Become a garden mild.

Blake predicted that one day when Jesus appears men will deem death as a way of relief, of being taken to a delightful place. (Here earth is the symbol for man). According to the Bible, sleeping is the eternal and physical rest of men, who will wake up happily during Judgement Day. When the day comes, all a sudden, everything is changed—the barren desert becomes a garden, and the earth becomes paradise for God comes to the earth for the second time. The two stanzas quoted above act as the introduction of the poem. and the story begin with the following stanzas:

In the southern clime.
Where the summers prime,
Never fades away;
Lovely Lyca lay.

Seven summers old
Lovely Lyca told,
She had wandered long.
Hearing wild birds' songs.

Lyca is the name of a girl. It symbolizes a human soul in a sleeping world of experience. Lyca's journey is a journey to the Holy Land. In the following four stanzas,
the narrator's voice switches from the third person point of view to the first person. This change—from that of a storyteller to that of a protagonist—increases the dramatic impact of the poem. Lyca is discovered by the Lion during sleeping. (Here the Lion represents the Angel of Death) He stripes Lyca of her corporal cover and goes with other animals to his cave:

Which the lioness
Loss'd her slender dress,
And naked they convey'd
To caves the sleeping maid.

Blake likes to emphasize "nakedness" in order to denote the inter-relationship between life and death. Man comes to earth naked, and should leave the earth naked. Thus, the nature of life and death should be similar. In his "The Little Girl Found", Blake describes this concept in detail. The first six stanzas of the poem are about the mental journey of a life. It starts from Lyca's parents looking for her:

Till before their way
A couching lion lay.

The Angel of Death becomes "A Spirit Arm'd in Gold," and leads the parents to the place where the girl is still sleeping. Blake uses the technique of irony at the climax of the poem. In the end, the parents who brave their lives to find their daughter do not have fear any more and build their house in the land where the lions and tigers live. And it is on this land where they locate their daughter.
Then they followed,
Where the vision led;
And saw their sleeping child,
Among tygers wild.
To this day they dwell
In a longly dell
Nor fear the wolfish howl,
Nor the lions growl.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The style of Blake is unique and unprecedented in the poetic circles of England. In the history of English literature, Blake is almost always alone, all by himself. He does not belong to any group. His thoughts and emotions surpassed those of his contemporaries and his poetry was not received by the reading public of his own time. The 18th Century saw a great number of poets trapped desperately in a marsh, unable to move. Blake publicly said that the repression of oneself is a sin and he did not want to accept this sin. To seek relief from this repression, Blake remained in the land of the mystery and imagination.

In Blake's time, many people thought that Blake was a lunatic, and that Blake was mentally deranged. In the world of literature, Blake dictatorially lived on his own style, and refused to compromise with the trends of his times. In his seventy years of life, he struggled endlessly for the rebirth of mankind. He created his own philosophy to interpret what he wished to preach. He had his own ideals and strong feelings for love. He stands on top of the literary hill and has been highly praised by the poets of the 20th Century.

T. S. Eliot notes that Blake is a great poet. He points out that what Blake reveals is not the disease of a certain period or of a certain trend, but the fundamental illness of the human soul. It is this idea which marks the nature of Blake's great works.

In the "Introduction" from Songs of Innocence, Blake explained his reasons for writing the poem. He said:
Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

In many places, the child appears in the image of Jesus Christ, descending from the top of the cloud. The response of this child to the innocent tone of the piper is the response of the soul to purity, a response which takes place unconsciously. In the beginning, the child happily listens to the music; later, he asks the piper to play the music again. While listening, he cannot help weeping. Here Blake hints that his songs might not always be happy. When the child first listens to the song, he seems to hear something happy, but when he listens to it again, he catches the melancholy tone. Thus, if one reads Blake's poems more carefully, one will read of the sorrows of mankind.

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
Sing the songs of happy cheer"
So I sang the song again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

In the following stanza, the image gets stronger. The child requests not only the music but also the lyric.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read,"
So he vanish'd from my sight,
And I pluck'd a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.
The meaning and the so-called dramatic action of this poem come to an end with the last line reading "So he vanish'd from my sight."

The poems of *Innocence* displays a weak happiness, or a surface joy. Blake did not mean to merely describe a world of innocence in which the children are kept ignorant of the sadness and hunger of the outside world. He tried to write from his experience, and he tried to write for the adults and children who are deprived of this happiness, thus creating for them a world of childhood innocence.

In *Songs of Experience*, the world of innocence, joy, and harmony shatters into pieces. This shattering may indicate the inner conflict Blake felt towards the choice of innocence and experience. And this conflicting feeling is a feeling between the shattering of the spirit and of nature.¹ The innocent dream is still a dream; and a dream is still far apart from reality. The first page of *Experience* depicts two young souls weeping for the death of two elderly people—a man and a woman. Death drives away both harmony and sweet dreams, making the death of the corporal transform to the death of the spiritual.² Making his conclusion, the prophet says:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past & Future, sees:
Whose ears have heard
The Holy word.
That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew:
That might control
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

¹

²
"O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass;
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous mass.

"Turn away no morn
Why wilt thou turn away?

(K 210)

In the "Introduction" of *Songs of Experience* Blake considered himself an ancient bard, or a prophet who could hear Jesus Christ talking with Adam in the Garden of Eden, calling on morally corrupted people to recover the proper administration of the world.

In *Songs of Experience*, most poems must be read at a higher level. The poems are all psychologically ironic and obviously promote psychological revolution. The source of all human sins is ostentatious empty talk. The inequality of society and the spiritual sickness of men both originate in mind-forged manacles. The revolution which enables society to become healthy is a psychological revolution. Revolution will help regain the natural order and state before the ultimate moral decline of men.

Bernard Blakston indicates in his *English Blake* that both innocence and experience are:

To accept, to trust, to believe, to love: these are the prerogatives of Innocence. To suffer, to doubt, to sin, to hate: these are the activities of Experience. With much ado the child is corrupted and made to learn the dirty devices of the world. . . . and wisdom is their recognition and harmonisation on a higher
level. No one can remain in the state of Innocence, not should he wish to do so; but it can be re-entered through the understanding of Experience.³

Thus, we must realize that innocence is a phantom state leading to the path of truth. It is also a necessary contrast to experience. In other words, experience is not at variance with innocence; it is contrary, not contradictory to it.⁴ The existence of heaven and men is as necessary as the existence of Satan and Hell. To Blake, innocence and experience exist eternally and it is necessary to have both exist at the same time.

The lyrical style of Blake's poetry is like the outline of a painting or the rhythm of music. It is tender and its tone is simple and harmonious, like the clearness of a drop of dew. The beauty of music is found in every page of his poetic collections, and this melodious and pleasant voice is heard throughout the pages. It is also worth mentioning that Blake might be the greatest Christian prophet of recent centuries. The religious wisdom can be traced in his poetry. His study of human soul and nature and his endeavor to rescue the world and unite the human soul with the holy spirit has not been surpassed by others even in the recent generation.
CHAPTER ONE

NOTES

4 H. M. Margoliouth, William Blake, p. 120.
CHAPTER TWO

NOTES

1. Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake, p. 193.
2. Blake's Innocence and Experience, p. 100.
3. Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake, p. 268.
5. Ibid., p. 20.
10. Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake, p. 176.
13. Ibid., p. 190.
CHAPTER THREE

NOTES

1 Nort. ... S'lak. (N. Y.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. ...
2 Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake, p. 177.
4 Ibid., p. 22.
5 Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake, p. 247.
6 Ibid., p. 177.
7 Ibid., p. 245.
CHAPTER FOUR

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 80.
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布雷克「無邪之歌」與「經驗之歌」
的主題與象徵之研究

蕭麗娟

摘 要

威廉·布雷克的一生（1757－1827）正當英國工業革命與浪漫主義文學方興未艾之時，然而，布雷克卻活在他自己神祕玄想的世界，獨步當時，自成一格。

也許是因爲同時兼具藝術家與詩人的身份，布雷克的詩歌美麗如畫；他的思想情感往往超越他的時代，因此，他的詩歌，不為他的時人所重視。但是，二十世紀的讀者卻深深地體會了在他淺顯的文字裡蘊涵的寶貴真理，讚譽他是時代的先知與預言者。

布雷克認爲「無邪」與「經驗」是人類靈魂從萌芽到成長的過程。在「無邪」的境界，人與上帝合一，視世界為光明、善良與美好；而在「經驗」的境界，人與上帝分離，世界充滿了欺騙、詐偽與邪惡。布雷克以童稚之言，描繪人類靈魂兩種相反的情況，主要在對當時工業革命所帶來的人類思想心靈的束縛，尋求解脫，而最終目的，在使人性反璞歸真。

我們今天的人類，工業文明的高速成長，思想心靈所受的衝激，千百倍於布雷克當時的社會，當然也不能不對布雷克「無邪之歌」與「經驗之歌」的真知灼見，發出由衷的喝采了。
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