

“*Without contraries is no progression*”——— How does William Blake present the contraries in the poems in your syllabus.

"Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell."

———*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,
William Blake

The second part of plate 3 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* deals with Blake's explanation that contraries are necessary for any sort of progression. The intention is to equalize both states, that is, contraries are to be seen as necessary parts to form a unity or perfection. Also, the one without the other would lack definition. Without contraries there is surely no fluidity achieved which logically leads to stagnation. In the “Blakean notion of “double vision”, opposites and contraries coexist in one and the same thing. These contraries give ‘energy’ to the narrative.

One of the most celebrated poems in English literature, *The Lamb* is a dialogue between a child and a Lamb. Blake's illustration for the poem shows a protective world of nature surrounding the child and the lamb. Doves, which are symbol of peace and love, sit on the cottage roof, and a stream, water being a biblical symbol of life, flows in the foreground. In the midst of this serenity is a naked child and a flock of lambs. The child is shown as addressing himself to one of the lambs. The nudity of the child is reminiscent of man's state of innocence before the Fall, before experience destroys this state of childlike innocence.

The Lamb is a universal symbol of selfless innocence. Jesus in the Bible is referred to as a Lamb who was sacrificed and in whose blood the sins of the world was washed away. Thus the Lamb is a symbol of Christian compassion as well as sacrifice, death, and tragedy. Moreover, since Jesus is God who became Man, the Lamb becomes a symbol of Divine Humanity. In the poem, the child asks questions to which he himself, being full of faith, finds simple, straight forward answers. For instance, the child asks the Lamb, "Little Lamb, who made thee?" A question for which he himself provides the answer-

"Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself the Lamb."

Thus the world portrayed in this poem is that of confidence and trust, the deeper questions have yet to be raised in *The Tyger*.

The Tyger is one of Blake's most admired poems. It earned praises from great Romantics Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb. This poem hinges on a very real and key question raised in the poem-

"Did he who made the Lamb make thee?"

The knowledge we gain through experience is often harsh and painful because it is difficult for the human mind to accept the dualities or the contrary states of existence. The persona in the poem, for instance, is bewildered to find that the God who made the Lamb, which is a symbol of peace, has also made the Tiger, which is a symbol of wrath. The poems *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* highlight the fact that wisdom lies in accepting all creation as each of them have a rightful place in the world order.

The Tyger is replete with unanswered questions altering from

"What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" to
"What immortal hand or eye
"Dare frame thy fearful symmetry"

These questions serve to produce an accumulated awe for the Creator. They also reveal man's limited capacity to conceive God and His mysteries.

The Lamb and the Tiger are symbols for two different states of the human soul. When the 'Lamb' is destroyed by experience, the 'tiger' is needed to restore the soul. This poem acknowledges that there is room for pain and destruction alongside love and harmony. Pain is necessary to realize love or cleanse the world (Sengupta and Cama). *The Tyger*, thus is a poem about the necessary evil created by a good God, thereby underscoring the fact that both innocence, portrayed by the Lamb, and experience, portrayed by the Tiger, are necessary for human development. The "burning" tiger with its fiery eyes is not just a symbol of wrath but also a symbol of destruction because destruction paves the way for renewal.

According to Mark Schorer the juxtaposition of the lamb and the tiger not only refers to two contrary states of the soul, namely innocence and experience, but also to the resolution of the paradox they present. When the innocent impulses of the lamb are curbed by restraints it turns into a tiger of wrath. The innocence is converted into experience. Thus he explains that when

energy or impulses are curbed they are not destroyed. Rather once it reaches the limits of its endurance; it bursts forth into revolutionary wrath.

Sengupta and Cama analyze *The Tyger* by interpreting the different groups of images contained in the poem. Nights, forests, and stars are frequently used by Blake as symbols of the old order of Europe. Biblical prophets sometimes use the forest to stand for the corrupt order which God will burn. Blake also regarded stars as symbols of oppression because they were regarded as instruments of fate. Thus the defeat of the stars would signify the casting away of both cosmic and internal restraint and the freeing of man to realize his potentially divine nature. If the just man wants to find his way out of the forest about him he has to give up modest stillness and humility and imitate the actions of the fiery tiger. Another important group of images in the poem are made of instruments- hammer, chain, furnace, and anvil. In Blake's prophetic works these instruments are symbols of the imagination. The furnace in which the tiger, a symbol of energy, is created is the prophetic imagination. The furnace not only melts down but also purifies, it can be destructive as well as creative. The furnace can also be compared to the imagination of the poet-prophet in raising, forming or altering the perceptions of mankind. Blake's furnace thus is a source of power where he is perpetually attempting to transform a base world or dead world. Thus, in *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* Blake is attempting to compare or equate the divine attempting to compare or equate the divine creation of God with an artist's creation. The God who created the innocent Lamb is the same God who created the ferocious Tiger. Similarly an artist has to be daring, be prepared to take risks and deal with the paradoxes in life if he wants to create works which are meaningful and important to humanity (Punter, 1988).

Martin Bidney claims that contraries are not only essential for progression in human life, but crucial for the whole cosmos as well. As far as this approach is concerned, Blake might have been influenced by Cartesian and Newtonian science. Norman Nathan rightly argues that "Contraries", as Blake defines it, does not suggest hostile entities. Actually, the word refers to the relationship of a kind of energy and the limit of that energy. For example, the foremost set of contraries is God and man. God is the imaginative energy and man is the limit of that energy.