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## **The Harmony in Contraries: William Blake's "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" As Interconnected Opposites**

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**Abstract:** This study analyses the philosophical depth of William Blake's iconic poems, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger", which embody the contrasting states of innocence and experience. Through a nuanced analysis of Blake's mythology, symbolism, and poetic devices, the interconnectedness of these seemingly opposing forces is revealed, and the dialectical progression towards an elevated state of understanding, which Blake terms "Higher Innocence", is explained. This unified state is achieved through the synthesis of contraries, leading to a deeper understanding of the human condition and the divine. Ultimately, this research underscores the timelessness and universality of Blake's vision, which coordinates the contradictions of human existence and challenges readers to reevaluate their perceptions about the world.

**Keywords:** Blake, innocence, experience, lamb, tiger.

### **Introduction**

The popular phrase "charity begins at home" originated from the ecclesiastical teachings of the seventeenth century. In the Christian sense, the phrase is interpreted more deeply than its modern-day connotations, denoting that the benevolence of charity should be born first inside our body, which is the home to the soul. But in reality, such an extent of self-inspection rarely happens within individuals. It is only when such purity is absent and hostility corrupts the psyche, the need for goodness is sought. Despite being opposites, the intensification of negativity doubly magnifies the significance and vitality of positive emotions. Hence, just as similarities between factors can create connectivity, contrary characteristics between those factors can equally interconnect them. Such is the foundation of William Blake's philosophy of Innocence and Experience, which states that all human beings are born with inherent, untainted, childlike innocence till they start gaining experiences for survival and reach adulthood that is far removed from purity and simplicity. "The Lamb" and "The Tyger", which are parts of "The Songs of Innocence" and "The Songs of Experience" respectively, represent counter-narratives that explore the bottomless chasm between the contrasting states of



the human mind. The macrocosmic appearances of the two animals vivify the microcosmic, metaphorical qualities they represent. However, Blake's concept of the Higher Innocence builds an ideological bridge between the two dissimilar ideas. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he writes: "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence." (62). Higher Innocence describes a unified state of being achieved through a dialectical progression, synthesising the contrasting states of Innocence and Experience. In simple terms, it is a state of ultimate wisdom where one recovers and celebrates innocence after having suffered the loss of it through the complexity of experience and ageing. Blake's beliefs do not villainise experience, but rather utilise it for a cathartic maturation. There are very few instances in the history of English literature where metaphorical poetry is so candidly linked to the human condition and spirituality, without being overtly religious. T. S. Eliot, in his essay titled "William Blake", writes that his poetry has "a peculiar honesty, which, in a world too frightened to be honest, is peculiarly terrifying. It is an honesty against which the whole world conspires, because it is unpleasant. Blake's poetry has the unpleasantness of great poetry." (45). Therefore, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" are emblematic of the contrary in connection and connection in contrary.

Symbolically, the lamb and the tiger are both associated with different socio-religious beliefs since ancient times. Similarly, in Blake's philosophy, both symbols denote juxtaposed states of being. Blake, in the "Introduction to the Songs of Innocence", writes:

"On a cloud I saw a child.  
And he laughing said to me.  
Pipe a song about a Lamb;  
So I piped with merry cheer,"  
(lines 3-6)

The lamb becomes central to the iconography of innocence. In Judaism and Christianity, lambs symbolise purity and sacrifice, starting from the example of Moses leading the Jews as he led his lambs, to Jesus being called the lamb of God as he immolated himself like a lamb to the slaughter. In the last stanza of "The Lamb":

"He is called by thy name,  
For he calls himself a Lamb:



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He is meek & he is mild,  
He became a little child:"  
(lines 13-16),

the creature functions as a multi-faceted symbol. It represents Christ and his holiness, the exchangeability between the creation and the creator, and lastly, it works as the connector between God and the child. The child understands his equity with God through the lamb's exhibition of the same innocence he too has. On the other hand, in Greek mythology, tigers symbolise progression, strength and protection as they carry chariots of Gods such as Dionysus and Athena. With the interesting opening and unusual spelling of "tyger", Blake draws attention to the unconventional yet enabling capability, brute but revolutionary force the tiger signifies. Its frightful demeanour and eyes that are "burning bright"(line 1) are not destructive but necessary to protect the innocence the lamb embodies. Blake, in "Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion", writes, "I must create a system, or be enslaved by another man's. I will not reason and compare: my business is to create."(12). Like the rebellious figure of Icarus<sup>1</sup>, the tiger symbolises similar sentiments against the oppressive British laws post-French Revolution<sup>2</sup> that Blake's poems "Europe a Prophecy" and "French Revolution" do as well. Its illuminated figure amidst "the forests of the night"(line 2) announces a purgatorial redemption and the birth of a new era out of repression. The "stars"(line 17) throwing down their "spears"(line 17) specifies experience to be the compulsory emotion to restore logic and order.

Upon reading the poems, the foremost contrast between the two is understood through the difference between their language and diction. "The Lamb" mirrors the phonetics of a child with its limited vocabulary, repetitive lines, rhythmic tone, and simple questions. The poem reaches a conclusion through a pattern of questions and answers, contrary to the unanswered questions in "The Tyger". The similar pattern of the child answering his own questions is seen in "Infant Joy" as well:

"What shall I call thee?  
I happy am  
Joy is my name,—  
Sweet joy befall thee!"  
(lines 3-6)

Contrariwise, “The Tyger” contains formal words, a greater number of stanzas, symbolism, Hellenism<sup>3</sup>, and complex images that need to be connected to Blake's mythology. The poem contains meticulous cataloguing of the physical appearance of the tiger, while the lamb has been described more through its actions than its appearance. Although both poems are written in Trochaic metre, “The Lamb” uses long vowels and monosyllabic words to cast a sense of pastoral calmness and lucidity that is closely related to the philosophy of Innocence. “The Lamb” has a first-person narrator, but “The Tyger”, having a third-person narrator who is missing in the poem, explains the shift from innocent curiosity to experienced debate. The process of the creation of the lamb is spontaneous, like a child learning to walk and talk. It is a light-hearted, pleasant description of how the lamb finds its sweet home in the world and emits sweetness in return, as the poem states :

"Gave thee life & bid thee feed.  
By the stream & o'er the mead; ...  
Gave thee such a tender voice,  
Making all the vales rejoice!"  
(lines 3-6)

The aesthetic beauty that the lamb is naturally gifted with, is achieved by the tiger through "fearful symmetry"(line 4). The tiger is born out of the combined strength of the fiery "furnace"(line 14) that cleanses, "hammer"(line 13), "anvil"(line 15), "chain"(line 13) and "spears"(line 17) that proportions, along with the creator's "immortal hand"(line 3) and "dread grasp"(line 15). Like Prometheus<sup>4</sup> creating man out of mud, the tiger's formation reveals the aspiration and labour behind it, compared to no such desire being mentioned in creating the lamb. Metaphorically, the tedious formation of the tiger articulates the maturation of the human self, done through the intricate experiences one acquires. Wrong surroundings and ill-suited means of development lead one astray. But Blake's “tyger” embodies the ideal experiences that pave the path to reach a Nirvana-like stage of elevated understanding of reality.

Blake's creations are interlinked with his philosophy of the Zoas or four-fold vision. Zoas were his medium of interpreting reality based on different human emotions. Simply put, the Zoas embody the different energies exuded by the soul or all humanity. Each Zoa represents a physical part of the body and a distinct



psychological quality, along with an element of nature linked to that quality. “The Lamb” is inspired by the Zoa of Urthona or LOS, which in human form represents the spirit and harbours the faculty of imagination. The child, through its simple yet profound questioning, proves that he has an intuitive idea of the world and spirituality. Hence, innocence is not ignorance, but rather a state where imagination wins over logic. LOS is an anagram of the obsolete term “sol”, meaning “sun”, which is the element Urthona embodies in nature. The phrases "woolly bright"(line 6) and "clothing of delight"(line 5), which is a pun on “daylight”, justify such notions. In contrast, “The Tyger” contains a reference to the Zoa of Urizen, in the lines: “When the stars threw down their spears /And water'd heaven with their tears:”(lines 17-18), as in nature, Urizen embodies the element of stars. In the human body, it represents the head or the mind, bearing the faculty of rationality. The term Urizen itself is a pun on "your reason", and indeed the poem represents the essence of rationality in the thematic shift from "Could frame thy fearful symmetry?"(line 4) to "Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"(line 24). Chances and coincidences are replaced with certainty and confidence. SOL and Urizen embodying the spirit and the head are vividly clarified in the poems as “The Lamb” discusses the philosophical questions on one’s whole existence, whereas “The Tyger” has sectioned stanzas reviewing the cerebral and cognitive growth of the creature.

The visionary poet-prophet Blake lived his entire life more as a painter than a poet. He himself admitted that the process of writing is secondary to his chain of creation, as he illustrated his ideas first and then transliterated them into words. His illuminated poetry is so deeply rooted in his illustrations that it is impossible to fully fathom the essence of his verses without analysing his painting process, known as “relief etching”. The painting of “The Lamb” vividly portrays the world of innocence through its light colour scheme, ample vegetation, and unity between the child and the lambs. The circular vines girdling the painting provide a sense of security and fulfilment, also resembling the gothic arch structure, which clarifies the religious implications of the poem. The naked figure of the child and its stretched arms touching the lamb mirrors the bare, outstretched Albion Rose<sup>5</sup> figure, welcoming purity, light, and positivity.



Illustrations of “The Lamb” and “Albion Rose”

Opposed to this, the painting of “The Tyger” exhibits rationality, linearity, pragmatism, and dryness that is emblematic of Experience. The saturated colours, the lifeless tree, the solitary tiger, and dark shadows at the top of its figure instead of the bottom, are Blake’s deliberate attempt at establishing a world more mature and evolved than that of Innocence. The stone-cold eyes of the tiger and its Trilithon-looking<sup>6</sup> stature are similar to the Urizen figure<sup>7</sup> drawn by Blake, who remains bound in shackles of experience.



Illustrations of “The Tyger” and “Urizen”



Man is central to Blake's philosophy. To him, God and man are interchangeable terms, and such a belief is manifested in Blake's lines in *The Everlasting Gospel*: "Thou art a Man: God is no more. Thy own Humanity learn to adore" (19). The question "Did he smile his work to see?/ Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" (lines 19-20) invites the reader to contemplate the apparent contradiction between the two creations. How could the same divine force responsible for the gentle lamb also bring forth the fearsome tiger? This paradox challenges the conventional notion of an exclusively loving and nurturing God and forces the reader to grapple with the presence of violence, cruelty, and evil that naturally exist in the world as the darker side of reality. Blake's use of this line highlights his philosophical concept of contraries, which suggests that opposites are necessary for the progression of human understanding and the attainment of a higher truth. The lamb and the tiger represent the contrasting aspects of innocence and experience, and their coexistence in the same divine realm challenges the reader to reconcile these seeming contradictions. Furthermore, the line resonates with deeper theological inquiries about the nature of God and the role of human perception. Blake questions whether our limited human understanding can truly comprehend the complexity and vastness of the divine Creator. The tiger's "fearful symmetry" (line 4) and the awe-inspiring power required to forge such a creature challenge the reader's preconceptions and invite a more nuanced and expansive understanding of the divine. In "Proverbs of Hell", Blake writes: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom...You never know what is enough until you know what is more than enough." (24). The more his philosophy, along with the poems, is analysed, the more interpretations can be found, and that is the essence of his poetic epistemology. While the differences emphasise the present paradox, the synthesis anticipates the future unification. Thus, Blake's philosophy proves to be immensely humanitarian in seeking and establishing the goodness of God and the beauty of spirituality. Contraries, hence, become complementary. Beyond the ethics of science, the search for imagination to reach spiritual transcendence continues.

#### Endnotes

1. In Greek mythology, Icarus is known as the rebel, as he dared to fly close to the sun despite having waxen wings.
2. In the 1790s, during William Pitt's reign of terror, repressive laws were passed to restrict the radical press and prohibit political meetings. Blake and his contemporaries vehemently protested against this in multiple essays and political pamphlets.

3. Hellenism refers to the religious and cultural practices of ancient Greece.
4. In Greek Mythology, the Titan Prometheus created man in God's image, giving them upright posture and divine beauty.
5. The Albion Rose figure is a painting by Blake, which embodies the state of utmost spiritual enlightenment.
6. Trilithon is a stone structure where two vertical stones stand as posts and support a third horizontal stone, which looks like a table-top.
7. As Urizen represents rationality and law, he is depicted as an old man, bearing the shackles of unbreakable order and the load of unavoidable logic.

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