

# 威廉·布莱克诗歌中的矛盾观点

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## 摘要

英国浪漫主义诗人，威廉·布莱克，在他有生之年并未得到认可。直到他辞世 30 年以后，人们才认识到他在诗歌、思想、意识等诸多方面的价值。辞世 90 年后，布莱克走进中国。周作人、田汉、梁实秋、荆鹏举、卞之琳、袁可嘉、范存忠先生等人撰文介绍其作品，带来了中国布莱克研究的高潮，至今不衰。可是这些学者对布莱克诗歌的解读常持截然相反的观点。究其原因，除了研究角度不同之外，不得不承认其诗歌本身确实包含了许多矛盾之处。

在阅读布莱克的诗歌时，笔者发现很多矛盾观点。《辑学小辞典》将此种现象归结为矛盾论：一切事物本身都自在地是矛盾的；不论客观现象或思想现象，矛盾普遍存在着；对立和统一是事物运动，变化和发展的内在动力和源泉。本文就尝试运用矛盾论来阐释布莱克的诗歌。

本文拟从六个部分来分析布莱克歌中的矛盾观点。

第一章概述国内外与本论题相关的研究和本论题的意义，提出论点。国内外很多学者对这位早期浪漫主义大诗人进行了宗教观、神秘意象等方面的研究，但普遍采取单一的立场。笔者认为在布莱克的诗歌中，诗人常常从两个角度去描绘一个事件或事物。倘若我们只从一个方面去理解他的诗歌，就会得出片面的观点。本文将阐释诗歌包含的矛盾因子，和这些截然相反的观点存在的基础。

从第二章到第五章是论文的主体部分。在这四章中，根据主题，布莱克的诗歌被划分为四类——宗教、道德、人类灵魂、和女性。这四章，每章三节，将分别分析不同主题下的矛盾因子是怎样和为什么产生的。布莱克对宗教的认识不仅来自《圣经》，还来自诺斯替主义等激进思想。这使得他对上帝这一形象和宗教是什么具有自己独到的见解。在讴歌宗教的诗篇中，布莱克将上帝作

为慈善、怜悯、和平与爱的代言人。然而一旦失去了这四种品质，上帝就成了自私残酷的父亲。这种矛盾的态度完全由理想宗教和现实宗教的矛盾造成。谈到道德，诗人憎恨传统道德观对人性的束缚，呼吁人们起来打碎禁锢的锁链。正如当时的反律法主义者提倡的一样，尊重人性，凭本能行事就是道德。布莱克知道这一主张肯定会造就一个混乱的世界。所以，他并不是要完全彻底地反对道德。因此，他在强烈反传统道德时，希望有一种道德可以既尊重人性又限制人性，可以满足每个人的需求而不互相伤害。布莱克的《天真之歌》和《经验之歌》分别描述了人类幼年时期的天真可爱和成年时期的经验痛苦。表面上前者是颂扬的诗篇，后者是批评的基调。可是，细细研读后会发现，其实这两种状态都是人类成长过程中不可缺少的。而且天真和经验两种心灵状态，也是生存状态，互相蕴含着走向相反方向的潜在因素。布莱克对于女性的态度上也有矛盾之处。因为同时受到男权主义和女权主义的影响，布莱克对女性持比较开明的态度，但是在其诗歌的字里行间仍能感受到他根深蒂固的传统观念。幸运的是，他知道无论哪一方企图成为主导，都会带来灾难。他渴望的是一个两性共存的和谐世界。

第六章，是结论部分，总结论文观点，深化主题。提出不足之处和有待进一步研究的问题。事物原本就有两面性。布莱克的精神畅游在自己构建的乌托邦中，而他的肉身却不得不面对现实生活的失望。另外，他生活在一个巨变的时代，当时各种思潮对他产生了复杂的影响，这些思想在他头脑中斗争。诗人不想否定任何一方，因为他知道没有对立就没有进步。这种思想反映到作品中就形成了布莱克特有的诗歌风格。

**关键词：**布莱克，矛盾，宗教，道德，灵魂，女性

# Contradictory Ideas in William Blake's Poems

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## Abstract

English Romantic poet, William Blake, is nearly unknown in his lifetime. 30 years after his death, some people began to realize his poems' value. In China, 60 years later, Blake and his works drew people's attention. Then, many Chinese scholars, such as Zhou Zuoren, Tian Han, Liang Shiqiu, Xing Pengwu, Bian Zhilin, Yuan Kejia, Fan Cunzhong, wrote many articles to introduce him and his works, which arose the climax of Blakean study which lasts till today. From these studies, we found an interesting phenomenon: these scholars hold totally different opinions on Blake's poetry, even opposite. Besides their different study angles, we must admit that Blake's poetry contains many contradictions itself.

When reading Blake's poems, the researcher found many contradictory ideas. *Logic Dictionary* defines it as law of contradiction, which means everything is self-contradictory; contradictions exist in both objective and thought phenomena; contradictions and unity are the powerful inner forces of changes and development inside everything (*Logic Dictionary*). This dissertation will try to use the theory to interpret Blake's poems in six chapters.

Chapter One introduces the research findings about this topic and this paper's significance. Many scholars have studied Blake from angles of religion, mysterious images and so on. But they mainly fall into two opposite catalogues. The researcher thinks Blake always describes things from two different angles. That asks us to understand his poems from two angles, too. This paper will analyze contradictory elements in his poems and the reasons.

From Chapter Two to Chapter Five, Blake' s poems are classified into four classes according to themes— religion, morality, human' s soul, and female. The four chapters will demonstrate how the different contradictory elements come into being and why. Blake' s relational understandings come from *Bible* and other revolutionary thoughts, which makes him have original opinions about God. As the spokesman of mercy, pity, peace and love, God and religion are praised by Blake. Once losing the four virtues, God becomes a cruel and selfish father. Such a contrary attitude results from the conflict between ideal religion and the religion in reality. Talking about morality, the poet detests that traditional morality binds human' s vigor and calls on fights against the "chains". As is claimed by antinomians, it is moral to respect instinct and do what you do according to impulse. Yet, such a doctrine must lead to a world in disorder. So Blake also wants there to be built morality which both respects and limits human' s instinct. In addition, Blake' s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* describe the happy innocent state of childhood and the experience state full of misery. On surface, he praises the former while hates the latter. However, after careful reading, we will find the two are inevitable during human' s life. And they contain elements leading to the other side. There are also contradictions in Blake' s attitudes to female. Influenced by patriarchy and feminism at the same time, Blake holds relatively enlightened attitudes to female on the one hand. While between the lines of his poems, readers can feel his deep-rooted traditional views.

Chapter Six is conclusion. Blake witnessed a changing period in which many contrary thoughts had a complicated affect on this poet. Although those thoughts struggle in his mind, the poet does not want to give up either side because he knows that no contrary, no progress. Therefore, he created his special style with these thoughts reflected in his woks.

**Key Words:** Blake, contradictions, religion, morality, soul, female

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# Chapter One Introduction

## 1.1 Literature Review

William Blake (1757—1827), English Romantic poet, living a poor life as an engraver and in isolation, “was largely unknown in his lifetime. Very few of his poems were published, and most of the later works only saw the light of day after his death” (Cox, 1992: 1). He used a symbolical framework that is enormously complicated and confusing. That is why his works are difficult to read.

On contrast to his obscurity in his lifetime, 30 years after his death, some people began to realize his poetry’s values. Since the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Blake has been regarded as “a major poet and artist of his age” (Adams, 1991: 1). Today, most of Blake’ s works have been edited carefully, and most twentieth-century critics have accepted him as a genius. The modern study of Blake’ s writing might really begin with S. Fester Damon’ s *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (1924), and in 1927, Geoffrey Keynes finished the one volume edition of Blake’ s works named *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Then, Northop Frye published his *Fearful Summary: A Study of William Blake* in 1957, which “paid particular attention to the way Blake read *The Bible* and to the symbolic structure of Blake’ s works” (Adams, 1991: 1). According to Adams, Frye “moved Blake from the edge of English poetic tradition to the mainstream, where he remains today” (Adams, 1991: 4). Another major event occurred in 1954 with the publication of David Erdman’ s *Blake: Prophet against Empire*. This book was recognized as the most important study about “the political implication of Blake’ s writings and the pervasive revolutionary allegory of his longer poems” (Adams, 1991: 4). The two books continue today to exert a powerful influence on Blakean studies, having served as standards and resources for almost all the later critical activities on Blake.

At home, 60 years later, Blake and his works drew people’ s attention. Then,

many Chinese scholars, such as Zhou Zuoren, Tian Han, Liang Shiqiu, Xing Pengwu, Bian Zhilin, Yuan Kejia, Fan Cunzhong, wrote many articles to introduce him and his works, which arose the climax of Chinese Blakean studies which last till today. Although Wang Zuoliang has said: “this (Blake) should be studied with dialectics ” (Wang, 1980), few researchers do so. But at least, that means Blake’ s eccentricity in his lifetime has been regarded as his genius today. His uniqueness lies in the images he created as the contrasting symbols. In “The Two Contrast States of Human Being’s Soul”, the author, Hu Jianhua said: “the innocent state and the experience state depicted by Blake reflect a series of contradictions full of attraction and exclusion, opposition and unity” (Hu, 1996). But the article only focuses on those same-titled short poems with opposite themes in *Songs of Innocent and Experience*. Tang Meixiu wrote a paper in *Journal of Changsha Electricity College* titled “Blake’ s Dualism Thinking Way and His Anti-Tradition Consciousness”. This paper reveals Blake’ s contradiction style only by analyzing “Tiger”. It has not been found till now by the researcher that any monograph or article talked about this problem systematically.

Blake created a unique contrary system in his works to express his ideas. Through the contrasting symbols, he not only attacked the evils in the reality, but also expressed his good wishes for the ideal. It is the employment of the contrasting between the ideal and the reality that makes his poems more appealing to the readers.

## 1.2 Assumptions

Do self-contradictions really exist in all of Blake’ s poems? How did Blake form such a unique style? This thesis will prove there are universal self-contradictions in Blake’ s different-themed poems. Poems about religion, morality, human’ s soul, and female will be analyzed respectively in detail. In addition, further effort is needed to work out how the poet’ s self-contradictory thoughts came into being. The researcher thinks books read by Blake, his friends, his life experiences and some historic events all contribute to the poet’ s contrary style. Facing such contradictions, most poets will choose either side. While Blake chooses to face both and never gives up finding out



the solutions although on occasion, he just creates an ideal utopia. To different contradictory elements, he created different solutions though some of them are not practical.

### **1.3 Methodologies**

It has been mentioned in abstract that law of contradiction means that contradictions and unity are the powerful inner forces of changes and development inside everything (*Logic Dictionary*). Marx also thinks that law of the unity of opposites is the basic law of the nature world, human society and human's thoughts. Thus, everything is self-contradictory in some degree including religion, morality, and human's spirit. That asks people to observe things from different angles to find that there are two sides contrary and supplementary to each other within all. Certainly, humans cannot escape from such a law, either. So, having different even self-contradictory ideas about one thing is inevitable for people are part of the world guided by law of contradiction.

### **1.4 Contributions**

What has been achieved in this thesis can be helpful to the study of Blake's poems, especially the contrary thoughts in his poems. Although this is not a totally new angle, relative work done by others is still not enough. And as mentioned, in China, the researcher only found two scholars who wrote articles about this topic according to the researcher's materials. This thesis will be a relatively systematic and detailed analysis of self-contradictions in Blake's poems.

## Chapter Two Contradictory Ideas in Religion-themed Poems

### 2.1 Real Religion in Blake's Mind

The *Bible* is the source of western culture, which includes literature. Therefore, its influence can be found in all western writers' works. William Blake was closely connected with the *Bible*, so he declared: "all he knew was in the *Bible*" (Behrendt, 1992: 68). Most of Blake's symbols are religious ones. Naturally, it is widely believed that Blake is a devout Christian. Since religion is always interwoven with morality, in order to distinguish this chapter from next chapter talking about morality, God, as a key word of religion, will be the focus of this chapter.

Blake's religion outlook has been a controversial topic. "For there are now a great many William Blake... and while some of these are very much more convincing than others, most of them have some plausibility" (Thompson, 1993: x). The researcher wants to borrow Northrop Frye's remark on Boehme's books to Blake's poetry: his books are like a picnic to which the author brings the words and the readers the meaning. That is why Blake and his works are still controversial. Religion is just one of these "picnics" while the researcher's proposition is one of these dishes. Yet, the source of Blake's religion thought is worthy of attentive exploration.

Obviously, the poet expresses his deep love for God in his works, especially, in *Poetical Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence*. The God portrayed by Blake is merciful and compassionate, who acts as creator and redeemer. In *Songs of Innocence*, God appears to be a shepherd or a father who helps his lamb-like children once they are in trouble. In "The Little Boy Found", when the little boy was lost in the fen, God appeared like his father and brought the child to his mother. Meanwhile, God creates the world and protects all his children no matter they are humans or other living things. "A Dream" tells readers what happened in the poet's dream: an ant lost its way so that it was heart-broken. Although God did not help it in person, this "father" sent a glow-worm to lead the ant to go back home. All in all, in *Poetical Sketches* and

*Songs of Innocence*, God is everywhere; can see everything and loves everybody. All qualities of God are concentrated in "On Another's Sorrow":

*And can he who smiles on all  
Near the wren with sorrows small,*

...

*And not sit both night & day,  
Wiping all our tears away.*

*O! no never can it be.*

*Never never can it be.*

(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 17)

The repeated using of "never" in the last line tells us, in the poet's mind, he firmly believes that God will sympathize with birds beside the nests when these lovely creatures feel sorrowful; he will weep together with babies when they bear woes and he will wipe everyone's tears away. We can imagine how woeful it will be when we are crying lonely. If there is a friend who sits beside us at that time, we must feel better without doing anything. God is such a friend in need. The scene in the poem is moving. Yet, if God is the protector of this world, why does not he protect birds and infants from grief? If God is the creator of the universe, can we say it is God who brings sorrow to the birds and infants? Besides, birds and infants, animals and humans all deserve God's attention. That is to say, they are equal. Then, why cannot we imply that humans and God are equal? In this poem, God is surprisingly powerless here for he can only weep sitting beside nests or cradles. If that is what God can do, then, besides God, humans can take God's duty, too. Just as mentioned above, shepherds guard sheep while fathers protect their children. So, it is not complete to think shepherds and fathers in Blake's poems stand for God. In fact, the image of God also represents all humans who have the qualities of mercy and pity. It is demonstrated again that humans and God are equal. Humans are also able to finish what God can do. Thus, to Blake, God is not the god with super-power and human form, living in the heaven, but a kind of spirit. Once possessing the spirit, everyone or

everything can be called God.

Blake's readers will feel confused: the poet was deeply influenced by the *Bible* praising God clearly, but why does the researcher think he believes in a "spiritual God"? Thompson, a scholar who is extremely curious about Blake's thoughts, has tried to discuss the various sources of the poet's complex thoughts in his *Witness against the Beast*. The book makes the researcher astonished about the colorful origins of Blake's thoughts. Although it is a hard question to answer, several words stand out and reoccur now and then, to name some, Quakerism, Gnostic, Jacob Boehme, Muggletonians, Swedenborg. They are seemingly irrelevant. In fact, these names and thought tendencies affected each other, so that they have some doctrines and ideas in common. And they connected Blake with the *Bible* in his lifetime and made him a special *Bible* reader who borrowed the *Bible's* vocabulary but used in a creative way. So traditional images and new connotations are combined together.

Many early Quakers claimed God was an infinite spirit filling Heaven and Earth, and all Places, and all things. Such a doctrine is embodied in "On Another's Sorrow". And once having the kind of spirit, humans, animals and God become the same. Quakers also taught Blake: "some of them (believers) are Christ, some God himself, and some equal with God, because they have the same spirit in them which is in God" (Thompson, 1993: 32). God is everyone as long as you believe. If you believe in God, you can believe in yourself to get what you want to get. In fact, you pursue and give yourself what you want:

*He doth give his joy to all,*

*He becomes an infant small.*

*He becomes a man of woe*

*He doth feel the sorrow too.*

(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 17)

God is clearly defined as a human in the following lines. He is an ordinary man who can feel sad, but he is willing to bring happiness to others. If everyone is God

wanting to deliver happiness and share sadness, God comes to us. If everyone has a kind heart, and such "God's spirit" can be found everywhere, it will seem that there really lives a God who loves all human beings. As a matter of fact, it is humans themselves who love and protect this world. Naturally, a harmonious world will come into being, as described in "The Lamb" which must have been read by all the Blake's fans.

In this poem, we can see from the surface, the speaker, who is perhaps a shepherd boy looking after his lamb, puts forth a question to the lamb in the first stanza "Dost thou know who made thee?" and answers his own question in the second stanza: "Little Lamb God bless thee". Obviously, the child identifies Jesus Christ with the actual lamb to which he speaks. He tells that story as an accepted truth in the way his parents have told him about the Christian myth of Creation. Having a simple experience of life, he is willing to accept the idea that God is a kind creator and a protector of all creatures without doubt. However, readers are not children. We all know who gave the little lamb bright wool, tender voice, its life and food. The answer is certainly its mother and shepherds. Humans are kind to feed lambs, and animals' mothers love their children as deeply as humans do. The poem gives a beautiful picture in which the divine Father (God's spirit), the lamb of the natural world and the human child are in great harmony, sharing the same qualities as kindness, sympathy, and protection to smaller and weaker creatures. With the three qualities becoming the common features of living things, peace can be got.

"The Divine Image" will answer all the questions about Blake's religion outlooks. "It is often supposed to be a profoundly Swedenborgian song... 'Divine Human' was the center of Swedenborgian discourse at that time" (Thompson, 1993: 146). It is not evident how Swedenborgian came into England, but its doctrine was chalked by unknown hands on walls round London in the early 1780s: Trinity in every individual man, of soul, body, and operation. Two Swedenborgian journals, *The New-Jerusalem Magazine* and *The New Magazine of Knowledge Concerning Heaven and Hell*, were published in London in 1790. We can suppose Blake has probably read

them. What's more, one thing is reliable that Blake annotated three of Swedenborg's works from 1788 to 1790. And the names of W. and C. Blake were found in a document of the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church in 1789. His attending the church manifests that he accepted its doctrine: everyone, every soul, every body are divine. So this poem is a celebration of ideal religion rather than an expression of a formal religious faith, which tells what the real religion is in Blake's opinion.

*For Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love,*

*Is God our Father dear,*

*And Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love*

*Is man, his child and care.*

...

*Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell,*

*There God is dwelling too.*

("The Divine Image", cited in Erdman, 1988: 12)

Mercy, pity, peace and love are very important in human life. According to the speaker, God is so identified with man that his benevolence is seen in man's acts. Whenever man exercises the four virtues— mercy, pity, peace and love, he becomes the part of his primal nature, and he himself becomes God, showing God's spirit. From his poems, we can see, the real religion is embodied by the four virtues in William Blake's mind. The four virtues are described in balance and harmony having the power to drive away humans' distress and representing the spirit of God. So, the readers should be clear that the God in Blake's writings is not the traditional one. In fact, God is spirit (mercy, pity, peace and love). That is to say anything can be God as long as it has these spiritual features.

## **2.2 Religion in Reality**

Blake's God is mercy, pity, peace and love. Then, we can get the conclusion that

God exists when there are the four virtues while there is no God at all if there are no mercy, pity, peace or love. Is the religion in people's real life the same as Blake's expectation? We all want to get the answer "yes". But, if the answer is "no", what does God or religion bring to people on earth? *Songs of Experience* will offer us with the real answer: in the reality we find a different picture. People live in poverty and suffer from social injustice and hypocrisy of the churches in *Experience* where God is not a loving father any more. Those have destroyed people's belief in God and churches. In "Earth's Answer", they angrily condemn:

*Selfish father of man!*  
*Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!*  
*Can delight,*  
*Chain'd in night,*  
*The virgins of youth and morning bear?*  
(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 18)

God ought to be kind, but he is a cruel father enslaving man now. "Cruel" means oppressing others mercilessly by authority. Why does God have authority? If people do not believe in religion, the cruel will not have objects to exercise power over. Then, why are there so many blind believers? Do they have any doubt about God's existence? God cannot give them answer in person for certain. His spokesmen undertake the task according to their will. A "jealous" person always wants to rob others of happiness. Only in this way, can he feel joyful. Cannot we use "selfish" to describe such a person? Finally, we draw a portrait for the God of *Experience*: he has great power and a great number of followers and representatives; his envies bring disaster to people; what he does is all for his self-interest. In a time with the mainstream of Christianity, Blake's views on God sound strange. Such a peculiar opinion has something to do with Gibbon: "he has ended up by accepting Gibbon's history, while redefining State Christianity as policy and self-interest" (Thompson, 1993: 190). Yet, the evaluation seems groundless. So we must consider why God is cruel, jealous and selfish, and offer evidence.

Compared with *Innocence*, which is a children's world full of fantasy, *Experience* is the real world which we live in. For this is the real world, God who is a super-nature image, cannot appear as a fictitious god. Instead, his spokesmen, churches become the target attacked by Blake.

Churches in Blake's description are guilty of all kinds of evil. In people's mind, churches ought to be as charitable as God. Yet the reality is that many people suffer from hunger physically and are fooled mentally by religion whose essence has been totally changed by avaricious churches.

There are two "Holy Thursday" separately included in *Innocence* and *Experience*, with the second revealing churches' crimes. In the first "Holy Thursday", the poet describes that thousands of poor children assemble at the church and express their thanks to God for giving them food and clothing. Contrasted with the picture drawn in the former, the second one in *Experience* makes a severe attack against the cruelty of the church and the ruling class:

*In a rich and fruitful land,  
Babes reduce'd to misery,  
Fed with cold and usurious hand?*

*Is that trembling cry a song?  
Can it be a song of joy?*

...

*Babe can never hunger there,  
Nor poverty the mind appall.*

(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 19)

In the first stanza, with the aid of a question, Blake points out that "Holy Thursday", in essence, is not holy at all. If God is everywhere protecting the poor just as the preachers in the church have told them, why do so many children suffer in a land of richness? As a matter of fact, since the mid of 18<sup>th</sup> century, many scholars



have been discussing whether there exists God/Christ or not. In the early of that century, statesmen of English Bolingbroke discussed secretly that Christ has never been born; Volney expressed the same suspicion in his book, *Ruins of Empire* published in 1791; Napoleon asked Wieland, a German scholar, whether he doubted the certainty of Christ without discussing politics or war when they had a meeting. Since Blake is open to various heresies, it is reasonable the thought of no-Christ is one of them. What a pity, these unorthodox views only spread in the circle of scholars, which just covers a small group of people.

Images stand out distinctly in this opening stanza, too. For example, “a rich and fruitful land”, miserable babies, and especially “fed with cold and usurious hand”. “Fed” means some children have really received some relief. But the so-called philanthropists are actually usurers. Now one may suddenly realize that the hands of the so-called benevolent beadles are essentially the cold and usurious hands. Thus, the poet shows his disclosure of the cheating of the religion through the brilliant image that is cut vividly by the “cold” and “usurious” hand. Churches’ hands are conducting evils, mouths claiming “mercy”. All readers cannot stop feeling distressed for those assembling at the church to thank God and priests, who take the cruel chief culprits as benefactors wrongly.

Then some other rhetorical questions following the first stanza are “Is that trembling cry a song? Can it be a song of joy”? The answers to these questions are self-evident. We can realize that the “song” here refers to the hymn; it is like the “trembling crying” of the children who are suffering from hunger and pains. So in the third stanza, Blake points out the analogies between the miserable eighteenth-century England in his age and desolate scene of “eternal winter”, which seem to make one feel the frigidity of the religion in their hearts and the miserable life in the real world. Special attentions should be paid to the last stanza, where Blake employs a contrasting image to describe his dream that the religion should make the beautiful society come true— “Babe can never hunger there, /Nor poverty the mind appall”. However, ‘should’ implies ‘not yet’; religion does not give people mercy. This poem ends in a

ideal merry picture, contrasting with the harsh world of reality, and makes readers feel the cheating of the religion in reality more strongly. So such a sharp contrast between the ideal and the reality reinforces the originally dismal atmosphere in the previous part.

Blake's hate to the church and the clergy is expressed in most of the poems. In *Experience*, there is another poem "The Chimney Sweeper", showing a contrast with the sweeper in *Innocence*, who believes that God in heaven blesses them, and that with the Angel's help, the sweeper will "rise upon clouds, sport in the wind". In the "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Experience*, the child sees heaven as a happy place, not for the poor, but for the rich. They live in hell. So we see crucial differences between the two poems. This sweeper is more aware of what has happened to him. In this poem, the cruelty and falsehood of the church are exposed and criticized openly.

This poem begins with a sharp contrast between the colors of black and white: "A little black thing among the snow /Crying 'weep, weep' in tones of woe"! The first two lines set off the wretched circumstances of chimney sweepers almost immediately. This is a pitiable picture. Then the poem continues in a dialogue between the narrator and the little chimney sweeper. The narrator's question is seemingly strange, having nothing to do with the sweeper: "Where are thy father & mother? Say? / They are both gone up to the church to pray". But it turns out to be very important. Could any affectionate mother or father be harsh enough to throw their little child, a treasure to them, in such a pathetic situation? No, of course not, but the answer of the child is surprising: his parents have both gone up to the church to pray. Irony is actually at work here. Parents go to pray for a better living condition. As a result, they do not get help and their children have to clean chimneys to earn a living. Maybe the priests pacify them, saying "Christ makes your children live in the world and everything will be better". Such lies go from parents' mouths to children's, then to grandchildren's. At last, religion fools everyone. Through the question and answer, we see the pitiable child and the indifferent parents, who are ironically devout Christians. The little sweeper goes on responding to the question in the second stanza:

*"Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smil'd among the winter's snow;  
They cloth'ed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe."*

(*"The Chimney Sweeper"*, cited in Erdman, 1988: 22)

The four lines make another contrast. In the first line, Blake uses symbolism to praise harmony of nature and innocent happiness. The word "heath" means a wild land, a contrast to dark chimneys, which is a symbol of the nature of purity while "I was happy" symbolizes a kind of innocent merriment. "I was happy upon the heath" indicates by implication that children will be at their best whenever they are cherished by nature. They belong to the nature; they can laugh even "among the winter's snow", whereas they sing "the notes of woe" in churches because churches are much "colder" than winter. The realm of innocence is always full of joys. By contrast, they do not like the spontaneous happiness of the child and clothe him in black, the color of death, to drive him to labor as a sad sweeper. Who are "they"? Parents? Churches? Or both? Parents will not like to make children sad. But cheated by religion, they do harm to children unconsciously. Combined with the ruling class, religion gets power. After all, the power belongs to the ruling class instead of God. So, the truth is that ruling class is making use of religion to achieve political purposes. Not only that, they also teach the child to sing songs of grief, crying "weep, weep". Why so? He says:

*And because I am happy, & dance & sing,  
They think they done me no injury,  
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,  
Who make up a heaven of our misery.*

(*"The Chimney Sweeper"*, cited in Erdman, 1988: 22)

In the sweeper's eyes, the church, even God, is just like the authorities that oppress them cruelly. The boy is fully conscious of the physical repression and spiritual bondage in social reality. So he says, "Who make up a heaven of our misery". Here, he condemns the church which cheats them and makes them believe they are

living in Heaven. Furthermore, the boy has realized the "Heaven" is their misery. He begins to blame his mother and father, who still believe in religion deeply. It is ironic that the self-righteous parents who engender the sufferings of their child delude themselves with the notion that they do him no harm. Moreover, they go to the church to thank God, priests and king, who make a false heaven of children's miseries. The hypocrisy of the religion in reality and the nature of cheating are exposed clearly.

In "London", another famous poem by Blake, the poet describes how the chimney sweeper's crying appalls the church:

*How the Chimney-sweeper cry  
Every blacking Church appalls,  
(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 26)*

The poet uses the word "blacking" to make the readers have a deep impression on the corruption of the religion in reality. The word "blacking" is symbolically used as the color of evil and coldness. For a long time, the poet has been a spectator who witnessed tragedies. As a Chinese saying goes: the spectator sees most clearly. He hears "The mind-forg'd manacle" "In every cry of every Man, /In every Infant's cry of fear, /In every voice, in every ban" ("London", cited in Erdman, 1988: 26). He cries out the religion in reality is like a spiritual manacle used to bind people's spiritual and emotional life. Blake has a sober mind, but he cannot do much. Compared with tradition and political force, individual power is too trivial. So "readers have even found to suppose that these two lines are a comment upon the awakening social conscience" (Thompson, 1993: 184).

No mercy, no pity, there is no love either. God delivers love to everything in *Songs of Innocence*. That makes people know it is so good to be loved and want to love others too. But, churches go the opposite way of God. They destroyed all things that once brought pleasure to children. In "The Garden of Love", the face of the "Chapel", another symbol of the religion in reality, is black, too. The poem also condemns the religion in reality, which has bound people's freedom.

*And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;*

...  
*And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;  
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys & desires.*

(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 26)

The garden where the speaker once had played has been converted into the chapel of religion and churchyard's burial ground for "thou shalt not" is written over the door of the chapel. It is full of graves. The poem points out that the destructive coercion to the labor people is from the religion represented by the priests who are the agents of repression. Here, the poet uses the black color, the traditional symbol of death and evil, and the graves, which also symbolize death and evil, to emphasize his hate to the religion in reality.

Blake realizes the truth, while most people do not. Those ignorant parents in *Songs of Experience* are good examples. The reason is that churches carry out their sinful acts under the guise of religion— they advocate "Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love" in words.

The four traditional Christian virtues are highly praised in *Innocence*, but in *Experience*, the poet demonstrates, "in a fierce fury of hatred and horror, all these tender qualities seem to the experienced nothing but evil, hypocritical and serpent-like in their luring power" (Damon, 1988: 212):

*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.*

("The Human Abstract", cited in Erdman, 1988: 27)

These lines make us surprised to find that Blake is a wise philosopher. If churches did not exploit the people, the people would not call for mercy or pity. In

reality, churches, which are said to be charitable institutions of religion, bring them much bitterness first, and then give them a little help. They duped the people and used their wiles to make people confused about what is religion on earth and what religion should give people.

### 2.3 Summary

Accurately, Blake got known of God through the *Bible* and nearly all the images and stories composed by him can be tracked in Christianity. Thus, it seems that Blake is a devout Christian. It must be admitted that Blake is a devout believer in religion for he did compose many poems celebrating religion, especially God's love. But under the influence of various "ism" (Quakerism, Gnostic) and radical *Bible* readers such as Swedenborg and Boehme, he created his own religion system that is people's spiritual support, standing for mercy, pity, peace and love. He really believes in this system. At the same time, he fights against the religion in reality that has degenerated. In Blake's mind, the ideal religion should be the spiritual support and consolation of human beings. It is the symbol of the unity of "Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love". But in reality, the kings, priests and clergies make full use of religion to govern the people. The governors do not really want to make people be protected or consoled. Instead, religion is their tool to achieve their political purposes.

In fact, he does not believe there lives an omnipotent God. In his view, God is abstract virtues. Blake is a "Christian atheist" (Adams, 1991: 142). In *Poetical Sketches*, there are two explosive little tracts: *All Religions are One* and *There is No Natural Religion*. In them, he proclaims the identity of all religions is not unprecedented in scholarly speculation of the period. But as a doctrine it is both heretical and politically radical, for it challenges the unique authority of the established church. There is not a born God with super-power at all.

But in reality, people are hookwooded by false religion. So the images of ideal religion and the religion in reality in Blake's works are totally different, but co-exist. In *Innocence* and *Poetical Sketches*, he glorifies the former while in *Experience* he

condemns the latter, which are respectively represented by God and churches. After all, the two kinds of religions do exist in life. If there were no religion, people would search for other spiritual supports. As long as people have spiritual supports, it is hard not to be made use of by politicians.

As to how to deal with this problem, Blake put forward Poetic Genius. "The Religion of all Nations are derived from each Nation's different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy" (*All Religions are One*, cited in Erdman, 1988: 1). And he concluded that the source of all religions is "the true Man...he being the Poetic Genius" (*All Religions are One*, cited in Erdman, 1988: 2). "The Argument", "the seven Principles", and "The Conclusion" in the tracts are all concerned with defining Poetic Genius, "the true faculty of knowing" (Cox, 1992: 2). As is also made clear in plate twelve of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake understood Poetic Genius or the human imagination as the source of all perceptions of God and all conceptions of regenerate humanity. With this declaration, Blake began his lifelong effort to demolish tyrannical conceptions of divinity and he laid the foundation for his claim that true divinity originates within human nature, as it awakens its visionary capacity.

The title of *There is No Natural Religion* is an attack on the deistic notion that "natural religion" (Cox, 1992: 4) is an enlightened alternative to the "revealed religion" (Cox, 1992: 6) of ecclesiastical and scriptural authority.

In these polemical tracts written at the beginning of his career, Blake presents the basic ideas which inform all his later works. With prophetic certitude, he sets himself in opposition to both the superstition and repressiveness of the established churches. The researcher thinks the following lines express his ideas clearly.

#### *Principle 6*

*The Jewish & Christian Testaments are an original derivation from the Poetic Genius. This is necessary from the confined nature of bodily sensation.*

*(All Religions are One, cited in Erdman, 1988: 1)*

*Application*

*He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio sees himself only.*

*Therefore*

*God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.*

*(There is No Natural Religion, cited in Erdman, 1988: 2)*

For a poet, like Blake, he can create his own faith in his works after realizing the governors' religious lies. But most common people cannot reveal these political tricks. For example, the adults in "Holy Thursday" of *Innocence* are cheated: "Beneath them (children) sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor ("Holy Thursday", cited in Erdman, 1988: 13)". "Wise guardians" is very ironic. It was the church that made people suffer so much, but the adults did not realize. What's more, they went to pray, to thank the church and helped the church cheat their children. But, at least, Blake has tried his best to waken these people and never given up his searching for the ideal religion. In that ideal world, as he wrote: "I (glow-worm) was set to light the ground" ("A Dream", cited in Erdman, 1988: 16). The title "A Dream" should not be neglected for it tells us the ideal religion only exists in dream.



## Chapter Three Contradictory Ideas in Morality-themed Poems

### 3.1 Anti-traditional Morality

Thompson contributed too much to the research of Blake's thought, for which his enthusiasm about this project is responsible. Objectively, the time Blake lived in was filled with radical and manifold trends of thought. Antinomianism is one of those. It is the belief that Christians are released by grace from obeying moral laws (*Oxford Dictionary*), the theological doctrine that by faith and God's grace a Christian is freed from all laws (including the moral standards of the culture). "Antinomians (in the eyes of the orthodox) are against the law...the name is most commonly applied to those who are, in pretence at least, mighty advocates of free grace; and object to the law as the rule of the good man's life" (Thompson, 1993: 13). Antinomianism offered a central challenge to the Moral Law, the Law of Moses contained in the Ten Commandments which have been moral standards of western society since Middle Ages under the avocation of Christian churches. "What must be insisted upon is the ubiquity and certainty of antinomian tenets to Blake's thinking, to his writing and to his painting" (Thompson, 1993: 18—19). Thus, "few themes return more consistently than his hostility to the Moral Law...the theme is found repeatedly in Blake's paintings and illuminations" (Thompson, 1993: 225).

Doubtlessly, Blake accepts the terms of Christian morality, Evil and Good, but reverses their values. The authority sets up their morality as the measure of truth, goodness and beauty, and calls themselves the righteous, the angels and heirs of Heaven, while those who refuse to obey are cast out as the devil's party. They are called the rebels in Hell. Angels repress joy as sin; devils hold it to be justice. In this conventional use, Evil is manifested by the Devils class which consigns a man to the orthodox Hell, which is everything associated with the body and desires and consists essentially of energy, abundance, act, and freedom. And the conventional Good, which is manifested a place in the orthodox Heaven by Angels and their adherents, is

associated with the Soul (regarded as entirely separate from the body) and consists of the contrary qualities of reason, restraint, passivity, and prohibition. And here Blake takes the position of the devil's disciple for he regards the common-sense moral (the common-sense truth, goodness and beauty) as a code of repression and prohibition. Blake's analysis is excellent: "those who restrain desire and emphasize reason, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling" ("The Voice of the Devil", cited in Erdman, 1988: 34). To Blake, desire, especially love desire is an essential part of man. "Few themes recur with consistency in the whole trajectory of Blake's work than Reason (often in association with the moral law) binding, constraining or corrupting life" (Thompson, 1993: 95). But in reality, asceticism is a cruel chain. "Where the Youth pined away with desire, / And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow:/ Arise from their graves and aspire,/ Where my Sun-flower wishes to go" ("AH! Sun-Flower", cited in Erdman, 1988: 25). In such a condition, although everyone is lamb-like in Blake's some poems, he does want people to meekly submit to oppression. In "Proverbs of Hell", he says: "The tiger of wrath is wiser than the horses of instruction" ("Proverbs of Hell", cited in Erdman, 1988: 37). That is to say: it is better to speak out your wrath and pursue the truth than only know obedience as instructed horses do. If you dare not challenge the unreasonable, you are certain to be hoodwinked. Blake has composed a ballad named "An Answer to the Parson", in which the parson asked: "Why of the sheep do you not learn peace"? The poet answered: "because I don't want you to shear my fleece". As discussed in last chapter, it is clear that Blake recognized religion's hypocrisy. Here, he carried out further action: to refuse to accept the liars' brainwashing doctrines. Such spirit of revolt can be seen everywhere in Blake's works. All in all, in Blake's mind, as antinomianism doctrine goes, the true moral law is justification by faith, not by legal works. Faith, in the poet's vocabulary, does not refer to the orthodox one but your own belief. Blake's belief can be concluded in the divinity of everything as discussed in Chapter two. In other words, virtues exist in humans' body, humans' action and the nature around them and come from impulse, not from rules. Only impulse can arouse truth, goodness and beauty.

Blake's fight for true virtues is not groundless. He has also provided many convincing reasons. In "The School Boy" of *Songs of Experience*, the naïve child complains about rigid traditional education and tries to persuade his parents:

*How can a child when fears annoy,  
But droop his tender wing,  
And forget his youthful spring.*

...

*How shall the summer arise in joy,  
Or the summer fruits appear,*  
(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 31)

Through very simple expressed lines, Blake explained his views on truth, goodness and beauty. In *Experience*, children are always wiser than adults for they have not been imbued with many hypocritical values. They see everything from their hearts and natural instinct, which is the ultimate truth. The poem tells us the school boy does not like school life for he thinks books and teachers make him depressed and deprived of happiness. His parents must have forced him to go to school, or he would not turn to them to ask for help. As most parents do, his parents think they love their child so much. But they do not realize that real goodness is to respect children's instinct instead of shaping them according to the stereotype values. The child gives detailed analysis. Children are like birds which belong to sky. So the adults should not shut them in the cages. They are like flowers which blossom in spring. And childhood is like spring. In a spring full of storm without sunshine, how can the buds be strong? It can be predicted that the coming summer (youth age) cannot be fruitful, much less the autumn and winter. Finally, there must be a sad picture. So, real beauty is harmony as innocent children are intoxicated with nature. It is surprising that the logic analysis is from a child. Maybe the real speaker is Blake because Blake experienced the same life as the school boy. Yet he was lucky for "his parents, ...were evidently most progressive in their educational attitude, and after the imaginative highstrung little boy, who was their second son. Had reacted with overwhelming fury and terror to any

attempt at discipline they let him study what he wished at home- largely reading and drawing” (Rubinstein, 1988: 393). Later, in 1825, Blake told Crab Robinson: “There is no use in education...it is the great sin. It is eating of the knowledge of good and evil...” (Thompson 1993: 87). For education was useless, Blake chose to study by himself. Then he studied from multitude “ism” and people, forming his special thoughts. The more essential reason is that he realized the education in his time is controlled or polluted by Moral Law which changed lovely children into ignorant fellows being not able to distinguish between good and evil. So he says: “Eagle never lost so much time, as when he submitted to learn of the crow” (“Proverbs of Hell”, cited in Erdman, 1988: 35).

Same feelings are aroused when reading the “Nurse’ s Song” in *Innocence*:

*“Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down*

*And the dews of night arise;*

...

*“Well, well, go & play till the light fades away*

*And then go home to bed.”*

*The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh’ d*

*And all the hills echoed.*

(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 15)

We can see that Blake celebrates the innocent play of children. That play, as the accompanying illumination emphasizes, is on a traditional village green without expensive equipment and with the children in a loose, harmonious group. Their shared pleasure is for a moment threatened by adult prohibition and behind the nurse we can catch other contemporary voices, religion, politics, especially the morality. But here the youngsters win for once and the poem closes with their celebration of a small victory. Nature seems to signal her support for that celebration as “all the hills echoed”. All of these things together— the laughing children, the relaxed adult, the echoing hills, and the idyllic illumination— combine to convey Blake’ s own personal sense of delight of the condition of real morality. This is a beautiful harmonious scene,

implying the union as an embodiment of ultimate truth, goodness and beauty, and this is the meaning of morality in William Blake's mind. "Energy is Eternal Delight" ("The Voice of the Devil", cited in Erdman, 1988: 34). "Exuberance is Beauty" ("Proverbs of Hell", cited in Erdman, 1988: 38).

In his works, especially in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which is an important expression of Blake's spirit of revolt against traditional value of morality, he advocates liberty to fight against the law of bourgeois society. One central idea in his works is its denial of the authority. Blake attacks all civil morality of his time, while he affirms the sanctity of natural impulse and the "voice of honest indignation" (Harold, 1976: 36). Blake elects to assume the diabolical persona what he calls "the voice of the Devil" and to utter "Proverbs of Hell". There is a lot of wisdom on morality hidden in his sayings most of which display his fight against the traditional moral standards:

"Prisons are built with stones of Law. Brothels with bricks of Religion" ("Proverbs of Hell", cited in Erdman, 1988: 36).

Moral Law is the production of religion and ruling class. Whether they want to achieve political purposes is hard to decide, but as passive receivers, the poet and the most common citizens experience more oppression than benefits of such laws. The root is those laws do not correspond to human nature at all. Then, it is hard for someone to avoid breaking the unreasonable rules. So, people's bodies and minds are caged in spiritual and real "prisons".

"The wrath of lion is the wisdom of God" ("Proverbs of Hell", cited in Erdman, 1988: 36).

If you do not want to live in the "prisons" for a life, you must struggle for freedom, in order to be free from Moral Law. "Lion" can be understood as "energy". When energy is restrained, people's anger will burst out great power. Why is it "the wisdom of God"? The phrase can be explained from two angles. One is that the God is the ideal one created by Blake. Then, it is easy to understand because the ideal God represents human's deity. So, human's anger and fight are wisdom. The other one is

that the God is the orthodox one. If so, "wisdom" possesses ironic meaning. The orthodox God has been in line with politics. Ruling class play tricks to govern people. But by doing so, they will stir up people's hate, which is the result of their own intrigue.

After all, the morality in Blake's mind should be truth, goodness and beauty in union coming from human divinity/ impulse, but in reality the morality is hypocrisy and injustice, oppression and tyranny. So he keeps on overthrowing old unreasonable values and bringing morality to its ideal state, words acting as his weapon.

### **3.2 Positive Function of Morality**

If all human beings' impulse deserves affirmation, if everyone has deity in himself according to Blake, it is unreasonable for him to blame Moral Law for the Law embodies the instinct, willingness of the ruling class and their views of truth, goodness and beauty. After all, different people have different understandings about what is right and graceful. Antinomians may ask: "why don't those kings or priests listen to our voices and behave according to our moral standards?" The poet may have asked himself this question, too. At last, he found the answer: maybe each antinomian has his own standards for they believe people are justified by faith. And what faith means differs for each person. Even if the ruling class yields to the antinomians, they do not know whose faith to follow. It is funny to imagine that those antinomians have to seek unities of thinking first after their enemies' surrender. So, to establish a moral system for everyone to obey, it is prerequisite to set up a ruling discourse politically. Anti-laws goes around and comes back to the beginning again. A new ruling system takes place of the original one. Who can ensure the new system will not be denounced by a newly emerging radical force? Therefore, to remove moral binding can only be achieved by eliminating class society. That is to say, each person is a society, who lives in his own moral system. Everyone behaves under the direction of his self-interest. It is not hard to imagine the result that the whole nation will be in

disorder and lack of safety. Blake must have thought about the problem of morality from the common people's and the authority's positions. Or he will not think limitation is needed when traditional values are attacked fiercely and energy (love desire, revolt spirit) is highly praised.

That is not strange. Blake appeals for going back to instinct and respecting individualities. In the mean time, he also thinks highly of beauty meaning harmony in a certain sense. If the world is lack of harmony, it will be filled with disasters instead of beauty. Thus, "beauty" offers a bound for "truth" and "goodness". So proper moral standards are needed. In this way, contradictions appear in morality-themed poems. The story in "Blind-man's Buff" explains the importance of laws to us. This poem relates a story which happened in a winter. Several boys and girls were playing in the house. At first, they only chatted. But they felt tired of talking soon. To be happier, some of them began to play practical jokes. The girls pricked the boys with pins and Roger twitched the stool from Dolly, so that Dolly fell down to the ground. Their games probably went too far, but they were not conscious of that. They even wanted something more exciting. So they called for blind-man's buff. The play of hide-and-seek is interesting but kind of dangerous. If Blake is a rebel against anti-tradition who praises natural instinct extremely, he will continue to make these children in the poem play happily. On the contrary, he emphasizes the importance of rules. Without rules, somebody must be hurt.

"Joys impregnate. Sorrow bring forth" ("Proverbs of Hell", cited in Erdman, 1988: 36). Dick laid in the blind man's way, and then the blind man fell down. His blood stained the floor. All the children were frightened. Just as we expected, the children being indulged in having fun laid bed for themselves. What is the reason? The most important is that there were no rules. And everyone only cares his own happiness. If they reach an agreement before the play that no one is allowed to hurt others, the game will not turn out to be a tragedy. Blake warns that such a tragedy should be avoided:

*And those who play should stop the same*

*By wholesome laws; such as all those  
Who on the blinded man impose,  
Stand in his stead; as long a-gone  
When men were first a nation grown;  
Lawless they liv'd till wantonness  
And liberty began t' increase;  
And one man lay in another's way,  
Then laws were made to keep fair play.*

(“Blind-man’s Buff”, cited in Erdman, 1988: 422)

Because of the lack of rules, the blind man was hurt when others enjoyed their excitement. Only when he was hurt, did he find it in significance to have regulations. And it is certain that others also wanted regulations to protect themselves from suffering the same accident next time. The same happens with a nation. At first, people all want freedom. No one likes to be controlled by others. As time passes, absolute freedom brings forth problems: wantonness, self-indulgence, cheating etc. Then, people call for laws, which will certainly confine freedom more or less. This poem is relatively long, most lines of which are describing the game, but finally we find that what Blake wants to say is that laws are necessary for a nation. Everyone in the world has his own benefits. If desire or energy is essential to human beings and should be satisfied, the result is that everyone will try to get his own benefits disregarding of others’ interests. Even, people will hurt each other. Meanwhile, everyone’s desire should be limited. Or he will impose on the weak. At last, “Excess of joy weeps” (“Proverbs of Hell”, cited in Erdman, 1988: 36). Therefore, laws, governors, morality standards are sure to appear, which are helpful to stable development of the world.

Does this opinion go against Blake’s anti-tradition spirit? It appears like that, but it is not in fact. The laws and morality in his time only conform to benefits of the ruling class (king, churches). Such laws are not those called for in “Blind-man’s Buff”. Real laws should limit the excessive lust of the strong and protect profits of the



weak so as to build a harmonious world. Yet, it is hard to form a morality system that accords with everyone's interests, for which the contrary between desire and reason (laws, morality) will exist forever. "Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy" ("The Voice of the Devil", cited in Erdman, 1988: 34). "This boundlessly clever image makes energy look like the whole substance of the world and reason only its skin, a bound that is merely the surface of whatever energy happens to be right now" (Cox, 1992: 75). Without energy, people have no life at all and Reason loses the root to rely on. If a person has a flesh body without skin, what great pain he will be in! So, without Reason, people must live in great bitterness, too. Anyhow, it is pleasing that Blake has never gone to any side extremely for he deeply believes that both are indispensable.

### 3.3 Summary

Antinomianism has great influence upon Blake's moral views. Surrounded by the trend promoting individual faith and instinct, the poet places himself in the group of antinomians unconsciously. So he encourages readers to fight against the cruel and unreasonable Moral Law which originates from Ten Commandments and to pursue the real truth, goodness and beauty under the direction of impulse. However, in fact, the antinomian doctrine is logically paradoxical because they pay attention to oppressed people's instinct and ignore impulse of the social authority. They are all human beings, who should share the grace of antinomian doctrine equally. But the reality tells us inflated desire and uncontrolled impulses are certain to hurt others' interests. The ruling class of Blake's time, which antinomians criticize, is an example. To govern the people, they set up a series of standards to control people's behaviors. According to antinomianism, are their instincts worthy of affirmation? Of course not. So the radical doctrine has limitations in itself.

As a matter of fact, Blake supposes "Malevolence without a Cause, is not Merit in one a Cause of Envy in another, & Serenity & Happiness & Beauty a Cause of

Malevolence? But Want of Money & the Distress of a Thief can never be alledged as the Cause of his Thieving, for many honest people endure greater hardships with Fortitude. We must therefore seek the Cause elsewhere than in want of Money, for that is the Miser' s passion, not the Thief' s" ("To Revd Dr Trusler", cited in Erdman, 1988: 702). No matter nowadays readers agree with him or not, that is Blake' s opinion that human' s original instinct is neither right nor wrong. The "cause" lies in class-society. "One does not need to find a Cause for primary human impulse or instincts: both love and self-love exist...such impulses or instincts cannot be rationalized or moralized. They become 'innocent' or Fallen according to context...which we could describe as class-culture" (Thompson, 1993: 220—221). So, no matter what kind of moral systems there are, traditional Moral Law or antinomianism, as long as there are official standards, some people are satisfied while some are not. Such dilemma cannot be removed unless there is no class society. Yet "the Fall is not cancelled out by abolishing the context...for humankind can' t live context-less and a new context will grow up" (Thompson, 1993: 221). Blake recognizes a context is necessary where people live in an organized way. Or they will do anything for own interests.

The unique way to solve the dilemma is to build a perfect moral system, say a free and organized society. In such a society, the real Good, distinguished from the merely ironic Good, does not imply freedom from restraint, but a "marriage" of the contrary extremes of desire and restraint, energy and reason. As in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake claims, "Without contraries is no progression" ("The Argument", cited in Erdman, 1988: 34). He thinks the contrary forces can interact without external restraint and without hindering or denying each other. The two key terms are "energy" and "reason", personified respectively as "Angels" and 'Devils". By "energy", Blake means the desire for instinct, and by "reason" he means the ideal reason that strives to supply the form and order what raw energy lacks. He does not mean to eliminate all bounds and confinements, but only those that hinder the positive act necessary to life. Blake does not mean to use "Hell" to attack "Heaven". He holds

that both are necessary to human's existence. Blake wants both, hence the marriage of contraries.

*Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that called Body is a portion of Soul  
discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.*

(“The Voice of the Devil”, cited in Erdman, 1988: 34)

What Blake wishes to build is “the creation of a new context in which not the ‘selfish love’ but the brotherhood will increase” (Thompson, 1993: 221). That is not only his, but also the whole humankind's wish. Although Blake failed to construct or find such a place by the end of his life, the whole world are still seeking for it, in fact requiring a utopian leap.

## Chapter Four Contradictory Ideas in Human' s

### Soul-themed Poems

Blake depicts the innocence state of human being' s soul in *Songs of Innocence* and *Poetical Sketches* while the experience state in his *Songs of Experience*. The two states contain a series of contradictory elements and unity which promote the development of each state.

#### 4.1 Innocence State

*Poetical Sketches* marks the beginning of Blake' s career as a poet. He was only 12 years old in 1769 when he began to compose those lyrics which were collected in the volume. The child' s eyes see a peaceful, beautiful world any time. The titles of poems collected in *Sketches* attract the readers to read carefully to find the ideal world in the work. There are "To Summer", "To the Evening star", "To morning", "How sweet I roam' d from field to field", "Love and harmony combine", "I love the jocund dance", just to name some.

Blake tries to depict a simple and pastoral gaiety in the ideal world. For example, in "To Spring", one of his four lyrics on seasons, he describes:

*O thou, what dewy locks, who look down  
Thro' the clear windows of the morning, turn  
Thine angel yes upon your western isle,  
Which in full choir hails thy approach, O Spring!*

(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 408)

The beautiful lyric bears a sweet atmosphere, which could not be achieved just through some beautiful words. This poem actually uses simple language that can be understood easily, and it is sweet. In the first line of this stanza, Blake personifies

spring as a young beautiful girl. She comes with her hair wet with the morning dew. The image of spring as a young girl is quite enough to make the readers think of the beautiful ideal state of human world full of beauty and youthful vigor. Furthermore, in this stanza, two verbs are brilliantly used— “look (down)” and “turn (upon)”. Here, “look (down)” depicts a lively young girl of spring who is like an angel; “turn (upon)” portrays a tender lady, who seems to have a deep love for nature and the human world. With the help of the pronoun “your” in the third line, the visual angel is naturally transferred from the image of the young girl of spring to the earthly world. How do the things in the world feel about spring? In the fourth line, Blake makes use of the phrase “in full choir” and the verb “hail” to convey that all the things on the earth are awaiting eagerly the coming of the happy spring. Though there are only four short lines in the first stanza, the readers are immediately absorbed in the happy and beautiful world. *Poetical Sketches* is a world full of songs. All of the seasons, stars, morning, and hills provide people happiness, love and harmony.

The same atmosphere is continued in *Songs of Innocence*, in which children are the main roles. But, when Blake started to write the early poems for *Innocence*, he was at his age of 27. Why was he still indulged in the childish joy? Maybe it is nothing strange because when mentioning “innocence”, people always connect it with children. However, for Blake, childhood is much more valuable. In the winter of 1787, Blake’s beautiful younger brother Robert died of illness. Robert was the person upon whom he had been able to bestow a full measure of love and devotion. His death was such a bolt from the blue for Blake that he even wanted religion to make them live together like before. “He became devoutly Christian. The quest for the Christ within himself was aroused by a corresponding search for the spirit of his dead brother” (James, 1991: 56). Such a dramatic change made him cannot free himself from sadness. He could only use religion and remembrance as narcotic. Then, he “soon turned to the world of childhood innocence, a pursuit in part kindled by his remembrances of himself at nine when Robert had been born” (James, 1991: 56). The younger man was born once again in his elder brother’s poem:

*I have no name*

*I am but two days old. —*

*What shall I call thee?*

*I happy am*

*Joy is my name, —*

*Sweet joy befall thee!*

(“Infant Joy”, cited in Erdman, 1988: 16)

The newborn baby may be Robert or Blake himself. When they were born, they knew nothing. So they felt happy for entering a new world. They were not able to think about from where the happiness came. But they firmly believed everyone were as joyful as he imagined. And this poem can also be understood as a hope of Robert’s rebirth. Consoled by Christianity, Blake thought his brother could get rebirth in another world and be far away from the worldly misery; Robert became happy again and told Blake: “Sweet joy befall thee”! Therefore, at that moment when Robert died, although sad, William beheld “the released spirit ascend heavenward through the matter-of-fact ceiling, clapping its hands for joy” (James, 1991: 56).

Besides fraternity, sympathy is one of Blake’s major themes in *Innocence* for “the late-eighteenth-century conviction that sensibility is the finest capacity of the human mind and that it expresses itself best in sympathetic identification between self and others” (Cox, 1992: 41). So, the innocent world is a palace full of love, where people deliver sympathy to each other including the chimney sweepers. That is a serious social problem which aroused the public attention in 1789. The poor children must work in the chimneys to make a living. As time goes by, they breathe much ash into their breasts, so that many of them got lung diseases. In winter, many homeless sweepers would rather sleep in the chimney where is warmer. Yet, that is very dangerous. To our surprise, the chimney sweepers are still cheerful.

*And the Angel told Tom if he’d be a good boy,  
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.*

("The Chimney Sweeper", cited in Erdman, 1988: 10)

As the conviction claims, God loves people. Since they were born, they have been told that God would protect everyone if you learn to bear sufferings. And they believed. Thus, vision became their spiritual support to live:

*And so Tom awoke and we rose in the dark*

*And got with our bags & our brushes to work.*

*Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm,*

*So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.*

("The Chimney Sweeper", cited in Erdman, 1988: 10)

After reading the poem, the researcher does not feel sympathy or love, but a little pity. On surface, in the innocent world, even sufferings are sweet. But if we search for the root of the problem of chimney sweepers, we will find there are sad pictures, too. The beginning of the poem tells us: in England of that time, poor parents cannot afford their families. To survive, they have to sell their children or they will die of hunger soon. Although their dear children are still too young to speak, only in this way, can they live longer. At the same time, the children do not know what happened. They accept everything as their fate. Can that be a happy picture? It is the indirect tragedy that makes us more sorrowful.

The researcher has to ask: "why did Blake express his attitudes in an indirect way then?" Thompson offered the answer: "The *Songs of Innocence* were Blake's own offering to the life of the New Church" (Thompson, 1993: 168). The early members of the church were anxious to have songs and were looking for them. Then, Joseph Proud was asked to compose a volume of hymns for the church. "If Mr. Proud could have made an offering of three hundred hymns in three months, Blake (who can never have liked Mr. Proud very much) may have been stimulated to have a little quiet competition" (Thompson, 1993: 169). Moreover, Thompson offered evidence that "the members of the church were actively concerned about the matter of songs...when Proud informed the 1790 Annual Conference that his hymns were ready, much

satisfaction was expressed, but it was the unanimous request...that the Hymns may consist of Praises and Glorifications” (Thompson, 1993: 169). Up to now, we get the reason why the *Innocence* world is filled with happiness and love though we can find unhappy background behind some praising lines.

#### 4.2 Experience State

The negative background will come into sight sooner or later. That means the innocent state is not an ideal state for it contains elements resulting in experience state within itself. And when the babies grow up, they will find what the society is like and they will know the baby-like ignorance is not useful to earn a better life. They cannot change their fate until they find out the deep reasons for their sad lives and take measures to solve problems instead of being optimistic blindly. “Innocence is the receptacle of all heavenly good things, and therefore the innocence of little children is the place and ground of all their affections for good and truth, and consists in a resigned submission to the government of the Lord, and a renunciation of man’s own will...but the innocence of little children is not genuine innocence because Void of wisdom; for genuine innocence is wisdom” (Thompson, 1993: 170). That is to say they must experience a sorrowful state to achieve real innocence.

Thus, the world in *Experience* is a terrible world, where the earth is mouldy; babies cry; young boys and girls are lost; roses are sick; pale virgins arise from the graves; and graves are built by churches in the garden of love. “London” is the epitome of all social evil.

*I wander thro' each charter' d street,  
Near where the charter' d Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.*

(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 26)

The first four lines’ slow and heavy rhythm and rhyme imply that the poet is very s



when he goes into the streets or walks along the river, so that he gives long sigh involuntarily. The two “charter’ d” emphasize that even the streets and rivers can be bought and sold. People’ s physical living condition is destroyed. The scene before his eyes makes him angry. So the following lines become short and strong:

*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.*  
(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 26)

In the second stanza, Blake uses five “every” compelling readers into a gloomiest state of human. The observer finds besides the physical condition, people’ s mental life is quite depressed for everyone in this city is inescapable from the social constraints. “Every voice” and “every ban” imply the corruption of social politics and the bad condition of the state of human existence.

*How the Chimney-sweeper’ s cry  
Every blacking Church appalls;  
And the hapless Soldier’ s sign  
Runs in blood down Palace walls.*  
(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 26)

“Every blacking Church ” has two meanings. One is that the church is blackened by smoke. The other one is that the church has become the dark hell. The church is becoming black, but the symbolic meaning of the description is that the church is becoming evil and corrupted. It is no longer charitable to the poor children, so they become sweepers, and their bad condition exposes the true nature of the church and the upper class. The soldiers have fought for the country, but their fortune is very bad, and their living condition is a contrast with that of the upper class.

*But most thro’ midnight streets I bear  
How the youthful Harlot’ s curse*

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

(Cited in Erdman, 1988: 26)

The young women have to be prostitutes to earn life in that time. They are angry. They curse the government for the unfair treatment to them. Because of the social poverty and moral decline, the marriage cart becomes the cart carrying coffins. And in a further sense, the whole society will die, too.

Following this wanderer, the readers seem to have entered into the eighteenth century England in its early industrial age. All these visual and auditory images are so impassioned that readers find it hard not to reproach the cruelties of the ruling class—king, aristocrats, capitalists and priests of churches, who are strangling the hope of the country, making the young generation of harlots, soldiers, even the babies suffer from endless agonies. Through the picture of the reality, all these sufferings seem to be converted into a kind of vision of manacles, strongly binding and locking the people's minds. In the reality, the upper class's laws ban the common people, they have no freedom; they are slaves. This is the reality of the eighteenth century England.

Seemingly, *Songs of Experience* is a sinful society. Yet that does not mean there is no hope. As long as people know the fact and try to change, the miserable reality will be better. Children in *Experience* are not as ignorant as before. It is happy to hear the little vagabond say: "the Church is cold, but the Ale-house is healthy & pleasant & warm" ("The Little Vagabond", cited in Erdman, 1988: 26). That represents the resentful voice of the people who were cheated and persecuted before. They cried out: "Thou Mother of my Mortal part, / With cruelty didst mould my Heart./ And with false self-deceiving tears./ Didst bind my Nostril Eyes & Ears./ Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay" ("To Tirzah", cited in Erdman, 1988: 30). Even though, action is more significant. Even the infants take some measures:

*Struggling in my father's hands,  
Striving against my swaddling bands,*

*Bound and weary I thought best  
To sulk upon my mother's breast.*  
("Infant Sorrow", cited in Erdman, 1988: 28)

Baby's power is weak as any newborn force. But, someday, it will become the force crushing dry weeds and smashing rotten wood. So, sadness is not necessary totally negative. When it increases to reach the highest, the revolt will break out. As the saying goes: "where there is oppression, there is resistance". In this way, people have better understandings about themselves and the society. They become wiser. Then, the whole society will be turned into a super-innocent state.

### 4.3 Summary

It is generally believed that Blake sings the praises of innocence. There are several reasons. Robert's death made him lock himself in the childhood remembrance. "Having been thrown into the world of bitter experience, he would examine the happy state of innocence" (James, 1991: 56). So, children become the main roles of *Innocence*. In addition, those children accept some thoughts of late-eighteenth-century in England, so they firmly believe that they were protected and loved by others. Yet, readers can find out the truth and Blake's real emotion. Ignorance cannot be what he praises for such an innocent state is lack of wisdom. "Blake is experimenting with an essentially innocent universe that nevertheless specifically includes loss and pain. In such a universe, innocence must be the source of its own suffering" (Cox, 1992: 63). The danger hiding in the state forecasts the coming of *Experience* state, which is a complement to unwise innocence.

Maybe simulated by antinomians and French Revolution, Blake began to criticize the world without the help of innocent words. That made *Experience* a terrible place for people to live in. Yet, the radical spirit and courage to cry out indignations are what the poet calls for. In the sense, *Experience* indicates the coming super-innocence. So, readers cannot simply assert Blake prefers happy innocent state

to sad experience state because "Joy & Woe are woven fine/ A Clothing for the soul divine/ Under every grief & pine/ Runs a joy with silken twine" ("Auguries of Innocence", cited in Erdman, 1988: 490).

Human's soul as well as human's life is made up of innocence and experience. Innocence indicates childhood, joy, purity while experience means sorrow and fights. According to the definition, everyone prefers to live in innocence rather than in experience. But, it is impossible. If there is no grief, people will not know what joy is because joy and grief can only have its values when compared with each other. From a person's life to the history of human beings, joy and grief often co-exist or appear alternately. When people are in childhood, they know little about the society. At that time, anything is pleasant. But, the world is not like that one in their eyes, which is an unchangeable fact no matter what the attitudes are. Meanwhile, children will grow up, and they must experience much sorrow. Then their attitudes towards the world will change. Complaints will replace innocent joy. As time goes by, complaints become reasonable analysis. Such a process is certain and natural.

*The Childs Toys & the Old Mans Reasons*

*Are the Fruits of the Two seasons*

("Auguries of Innocence", cited in Erdman, 1988: 492).

Anyhow, human beings always pursue happiness, especially when suffering grief. Grief makes people have strong pine. Pine pushes people to super-innocence, not a copy of childhood happiness, but a more reasonable and harmonious state of soul.

Through the contrast between the innocent state and the experience state of human being's soul, Blake expresses his understandings of the early innocence in childhood and the later experience state, and he revealed that soul cannot be divided into these two catalogues for they are both inevitable processes of one's life.

## Chapter Five Contradictory Ideas in Female-themed Poems

Self-contradictions are reflected in Blake's attitudes towards female. In Blake's time, people were constrained severely by hypocritical morality, religion. Then, women were in a much worse plight for that was a time when patriarchy was a vogue. Generally speaking, as a radical poet, Blake's attitudes towards women are enlightened for he respects female as human beings who have the same rights as men do. But, some details exposed his inveterate patriarchy.

### 5.1 Enlightened Attitudes Towards Women

The female images a writer portrayed can give readers some hints about the writer's life experiences and education from book and the society in a certain degree. Vice versa, Blake's life experiences and his thoughts contribute to the female images in his poems.

When he grew to his teenager years, that is, when he was apprenticed to an engraver James Basire in 1772, he had a chance to read many other books and contact with some of the contemporary writers. Seven years later when he was just out of his apprenticeship, Blake had been engraving plates for the distinguishing bookseller Joseph Johnson of St Paul's churchyard (Bentley, 2003: 108). Johnson gathered around him a circle of witty, liberal friends, including many of the authors whose works he published, and he gave plain but hospitable weekly dinners on Wednesdays at his house. The guests included Henry Fuseli, Dr Richard Prioce, Dr Joseph Priestley, Thomas Christie, Home Tooke, Thomas Holecroft, William Godwin, Tom Pain, and Mary Wollstonecraft. William Blake may well have met Mary Wollstonecraft, though there is no biographical evidence that he did so (Bentley, 2003: 110—111).

Blake probably knew Wollstonecraft, and if he had never heard of her notorious

*Vindication* he would have been the only literate person in London who had not. He may well have written *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* in response to it. There are scores of similarities between the two works, in small matters as in great. Both regard contemporary marriage customs as responsible for the selling of sexual love. Both enlist in the great eighteenth-century reformist crusade against masturbation, which they see as a product of social oppression. Both works identify political tyranny with sexual and domestic tyranny; both blame social restrictions for women's deceitfulness and false modesty. Both works insist on the virtue of independence (Cox, 1992: 118).

Under the influence of feminism, Blake models his female figures in a more positive way. By positive, it means that Blake highly praises and respects female:

*Wondrous the Gods more wondrous are the Men  
More Wondrous Wondrous still the Cock & Hen  
More wondrous still the Table Stool & Chair  
But Ah More wondrous still the Charming Fair*

("Imitation of Pope A Compliment to the Ladies", cited in Erdman, 1988: 506)

In Blake's view, female is far more attractive than anything else in the world. That is not an exception, for beauties are always inevitable roles in literary works. For instance, there is Helen in Greek and Roman myth, who even caused the fall of a city, and there are uncountable writers greatly admiring their rose-like ladies. Yet in this poem, Blake uses "the Charming Fair" to express his respect and appreciation for all women instead of a certain "beauty", no matter she has appealing appearance or not. Blake even regards female as divine as God:

*The nakedness of woman is the work of God.*  
("Proverbs of Hell", cited in Erdman, 1988: 36)

It is true that women are usually loved, but they are seldom respected. What females are to the male is often like what hares are to hunters. Blake considers female as "the work of God". For God is so scared that he cannot be stained, "his work" deserves the same respect as the poet did in his life. Compared with his unstable

career, his marriage is surprisingly firm. "He taught her (Catherine Boucher, his wife) not only to read and write but also to paint and assist him in his engraving, and the precipitate engagement began a devote loving companionship of over forty years" (Rubinstein, 1988: 393). "Working in bed a few days before his death", Blake said to his wife: "keep as you are; you have been an angel to me; I will draw you" (Rubinstein, 1988: 394). Although there is not any work extolling his wife, she is included in the female group eulogized by Blake.

On the other hand, Blake has deep sympathy with female for their unfair fate.

*Three Virgins at the break of day*

...

*The one was Clothed in flames of fire*

*The other Clothed in iron wire*

*The other Clothed in tears & sighs*

...

*To be consumed in burning Fires*

*And in ungratified Desires.*

("The Golden Net", cited in Erdman, 1988: 483)

In Blake's time, women are trammled physically and mentally. Besides being bound by traditional morality and hypocritical religion, they are inferior to the male. They have to depress their desire to death. They are only playthings shut in the golden net. As a man, Blake understands women's tears and sighs and feels sorry for them. That implies he considers female as equal as men. The "Three Virgins" represent all women in the world.

*The Eternal Female ground! it was heard over all the Earth*

("A Song of Liberty", cited in Erdman, 1988: 44)

In addition, Blake notices the importance and the values of women as independent individuals and encourages women to fight against traditional chastity concept.

When a writer extols a woman, he always depicts her pleasing appearance firstly. On surface, he is praising. In a certain sense, he is creating a female image according to a man's standards of beauty. After reading Blake's poems, readers will feel how Blake is different from others.

This poem begins with a conversation between the poet and a fairy. The fairy dancing on the poet's knee dressed herself meticulously with rings, pins and necklaces to please him. To her surprise, he blames her as "gilded poisonous worm" for she disgraced female. As mentioned above, naked women are the divinest to Blake. In reality, women have to dress themselves according to the mass', mainly the male's aesthetic standards. Blake is not in line with those men. He takes advantage of the fairy's mouth to speak out female's difficulties:

*Weeping he fell upon my thigh  
And thus in tears did soft reply  
Knowest thou not O Fairies Lord  
How much by us Contemnd Abhorrd  
Whatever hides the Female form  
That cannot bear the Mental storm  
Therefore in Pity still we give  
Our lives to make the Female live  
And what would turn into disease  
We turn to what will joy & please.*

("A fairy skiped upon my knee", cited in Erdman, 1988: 481)

The little fairy is an example of women. She is soft and subordinates herself to a server of men. She feels she is so lowly that the man is her lord. Blake is not proud of having female servers, but blames her for she dressed her like a poisonous gilded worm. He knows that women are not willing to do so, so he lets the fairy tell the cause of female's self-less living condition. They are molded by "Mental storm". What is "mental storm"? The chains fettering human's mind. For female, the storm is traditional opinions on women, especially men's prejudice. At that time, most women



do not attend social work. Their main job is to be full-time wife, mother, and nurse. Therefore, without economic supports, they are in the low class politically. And they have to play up to the male though they clearly know those requests on women are unfair and harmful to them. However, they still pretend to be happy when they feel hurt and live such a life till death. Blake's sad voice is heard here. In his view, "The nakedness of woman is the work of God" ("Proverbs of Hell", cited in Erdman, 1988: 36). That means nature or self is most beautiful and divine. Yet in reality, females are twisted into mundane "Female form". The several lines showed Blake's pity for female and his affirmation of female's individuality.

The little fairy is at the beginning of feminism road while Oothoon, who is more intellectual and sagacious, has been on the way.

*How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure?*

*Sweetest the fruit that the worm feeds on and the soul preyed on by woe.*

*The newly washed lamb ting'd with the villages' smoke and the bright swan*

*By the red earth of our immortal river: I bath my wings,*

*And I am white and pure to hover round Theotormon's breast.*

*(Visions of the Daughters of Albion, cited in Erdman, 1988: 45)*

Oothoon was raped by Bromion on her way to her lover, Theotormon. On hearing the bad news, Theotormon became reluctant for he thought Oothoon was not pure any more. Thus, Oothoon argued for herself, or we can say, for all women, against the male ideas about purity. "The daughters of Albion hear her woes and echo back her sighs" (*Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, cited in Erdman, 1988: 45). We can never say that the daughters of Albion show only their sympathy to Oothoon, but rather say that they share the same ideal with Oothoon.

"Women must stand up for their rights and not allow their male-dominated society to define what it means to be a woman. Women themselves must take the lead and articulate whom they are and what role they will play in society. Most importantly, they must reject the patriarchal assumption that women are inferior to

men” (Bressler, 1999: 181).

## 5.2 Inveterate Patriarchy

There is no doubt that Blake was deeply influenced by the *Bible*. The first thing Blake got from the *Bible* is the story of Adam and Eve, after creating Adam in his garden, God found that the little creature was all alone and decided to make him an companion. Then God caused Adam a sound sleep and took a rib out of him when he was sleeping. When Adam woke up, he proudly claimed that “this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called women”. In the story, man gives name to woman. The process of naming is a symbol of power: the one who has the right to name is in the dominating position, while the one who is to be named exists in a subordinate rake for always. Not long after they lived innocently in the Garden of Eden, the woman was seduced by a serpent to eat the fruit of the tree of Knowledge. What is more disastrous, it was she that persuaded the first man to eat that apple, too. For this reason, she was condemned as the cause of the sin. God punished her as an equal partner; she punished herself by enduring all blames and curses along. The whole story gives a clear distinction between good and evil. To a large scale, Christian belief says that God is good and humans are evil because humans have the original sin. To a small extent within the story of Adam and Eve, the male creature is considered to be rational, which is good, while the female creature is thought to be irrational, which is bad. From this perspective, whatever a Christian society associates with maleness is always called good, and therefore reflects the high, noble, unified self; conversely, femaleness is relegated to the evil, lower nature and reflects the irrational, divided self.

The tradition of connecting male with god and Good is continued in some of Blake’ s poems. The researcher thinks he did not do that on purpose for he did not praise men and condemn women clearly. In “The Little Boy Found” and “A Dream”, God brings the lost boy and ant home. He always appears in the image of father. In

“The Chimney Sweeper”, an angel promises Tom Darce that he will “have God for his father”. As a contrast, God has never appeared as a mother. Do they imply that fatherhood is inherently divine? Or do they imply that fatherhood is capable of bearing its responsibilities without divine help? The poems can easily give a clear preference to one view or the other (Cox, 1992: 43). In “The Divine Image” and “On Another’s Sorrow”, although Blake does not claim that the person who exercises mercy, pity, peace and love is God or father, “he” is the subject instead of she. These hints exposed Blake’s preference to male.

Blake’s inveterate patriarchy can also be seen from the names of female images in his works and their function.

*“The shadowy daughter of Urthona stood before red Orc*

*Crowned with a hamlet & dark hair the nameless female stood*

*Invulnerable though naked, save where cloud roll around her lion*

*Their awful folds in the dark air; silent she stood as night*

*For never her iron tongue could voice or sound arise*

*But dumb till that dread day when Orc assay’d his fierce embrace*

*(America, a Prophecy, cited in Erdman, 1988: 51)*

We see a picture of a woman, which nearly cannot be called a woman. She does not have a name. Adam named his partner “Eve”. Here Orc does not value the “shadowy daughter of Urthona” enough to give her a name. That means she is only a dispensable thing in his life, who is as lowly as female living creatures. In addition, she is naked but “invulnerable”. Human beings have sense of shame, so they wear clothes. Yet, the shadowy woman is naked because she is made of iron and has neither feelings nor thoughts. For she is made of iron instead of blood, flesh or bones, she is “invulnerable”. This word sounds commendatory. But real human beings can be hurt physically and emotionally. Her invulnerability proves that she is not a human. What’s worse, she can’t speak because “never her iron tongue could voice or sound arise”.

Such an iron woman cannot be born by a human mother. She is likely to have been created by a blacksmith, who is a male without any doubt. That means the creator—male has not thought about whether a woman needs their voices to be heard for they are only slaves of man. Their job is to serve the male and accept what the male gives them. Later, Orc raped her. She accepted happily for she smiled and it was the man's rape that gave her the ability to speak.

In a man-dominated society, women are always like shadow. Male is the origin of their existence. We can imagine, if there is no object, there must be no shadow. The same goes with female. If there are no men, there will be no women. To the male, female is a sexual partner, a reproducer and an otherness that male uses to find and construct themselves. So women's main value lies in the physical function. As the physical function is the common point of all female animals, to a certain degree, women are not regarded as human beings by men at all.

A human being who only realized the physical function is not different from an animal. Only by achieving spiritual and social fulfillments, can one be called human being. In Blake's works, there are many female images whose names are replaced by their social duty. Accurately speaking, that is their family duty. Nearly all female adults in Blake's works are mothers and babysitters. The only kind of women attending social work is harlots. Those clues showed that the poet could not free himself from the deep-rooted patriarchy totally.

### 5.3 Summary

It is not wise to say Blake supports feminism or patriarchy simply. As analyzed above, feminism came to Blake through his friends and books. So he began to regard women as equal beings as men. He even composed works exemplified by *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* to indicate his enlightened attitudes. From other short poems, we can find that he respects women and has original views on female. Yet, as a man who grew up under the influence of the *Bible* and traditional values about male and

female, no matter how hard he has tried his best, readers can still feel his patriarchy behind the lines. Feminists and those advocating patriarchy fall into two opposing catalogues. Accepting both of the two trends, Blake must have thought about which side he belongs to. Finally, he found a theory to deal with his mental conflict. He borrowed, from some source, perhaps from Boehme, the notion of “androgynous” (Thompson, 1993: 84). So far, readers can get the vessel of Blake’s attitudes to female with three works’ compositions representing three stages: *Songs of Innocence* (1784) for patriarchy; *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) for Feminism; *Four Zoas* (1797) for androgynous theory. By that time, he has been clear about the problem of the two genders eventually. *Four Zoas* is like the destination of the development process of his thoughts.

Vala’s desire to control over male is called “Female Will” by Blake, which is woman’s extremely strong will to be equal with man, so that it overdoes by taking the role man used to play. Although the will shows at least that women want to get equality, if the will is used in a wrong way, it leads to disaster and becomes evil. The leading actor of *Four Zoas*, Urizen, is a typical character standing for tyrannous patriarchy. He creates many mind chains to maintain his power even by temptation. This work is a rewritten story of Adam and Eve, Urizen taking the place of Eve, by which, Blake told the readers not only the female, but the male can also cause problems once motivated by power or benefits.

Male without female is in disorder and female without male is in isolation. At last when the four zoas mingled with emanations, the fallen Albion stood up as an androgynous giant. In this point, originally, Albion and the four zoas are androgynous ones in essence. As the theme of *Four Zoas* puts it, Blake believes “that human beings had first existed in an androgynous state, from which they had been expelled— just as Los was divided into Los and Enitharmon in *Urizen*. Such a doctrine implies that the unity can be achieved only by jointing together male and female” (James, 1991: 124).

By creating *Four Zoas*, Blake creates an androgynous world where both men and

women are equivalent, and expresses his outlook on the relationship between female and male, as well as his views on the university. Just as Alicia Ostriker commented: “The poet relies on an ideal of humanity as originally and ultimately androgynous, attributing the fall of man and what John Milton called ‘all our woe’ not to female narcissism but to specifically male pride, male competitiveness, or male refusal to surrender the self, and depicting a fallen state in which sexual division— lapse of unity between male and female as one being— is the prototype of every division within the self, between self and other, and between humanity and God” (Adams, 1991: 94—95).

## Chapter Six Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary

From above analysis, it can be concluded that Blake is very self-contradictory towards many topics, which leads to the phenomenon that many readers have opposite understandings about his poetry. For example, some scholars say Blake is a devout Christian while some argue that he is a rebel. Such arguments have lasted for a long time without a certain compromise. According to the researcher, those findings are right but not complete. Blake has said clearly in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* "Without contraries is no progression" ("The Argument", cited in Erdman, 1988: 34). So his poems are filled with contradictory elements. On surface, those self-contradictions are caused by different factors. Yet, in essence, they are all the results of the conflict between the ideal and reality.

In terms of religion, the conflict between ideal and reality has been probed in detail. Blake praises ideal God mainly in *Songs of Innocence* who has the qualities of mercy, pity, peace and love. And God often incarnates as a merciful father or shepherd. Living in the world protected by God, even animals possess virtues and feelings of human. Although God is the main character in his religion-themed poems, what the poet really thinks highly of is the four qualities. Once having mercy, pity, peace and love, animals are equal as humans, and humans are equal as God. But such an ideal religion characterized by the four virtues is seldom found in reality. In poems criticizing religion, God is cruel and selfish for his doctrines forbid people's happiness. Anyway, God is not a real existence. It is his messengers who carry out all devil behaviors. Under the guise of religion, taking advantage of people's belief in religion, churches take actions violating against religion's doctrines. Then, mercy, pity, peace and love become indirect reflection of misery. The conflicts made Blake sing highly of God and attack religion severely at the same time.

As to morality, as most poets do, Blake blames that traditional morality robs people of real truth, goodness and beauty. Because of inhuman morality standards,

people become depressed and benighted. So he pursues a kind of morality that allows everyone to enjoy pleasure and freedom and live according to their natural instinct. However, that is impossible in reality. If everyone can do anything they want, the world will be in disorder and there will be no harmony, no beauty. Being completely free is not free. The poet himself also realized the problem. So he had to call for both revolutions against traditional morality and morality's limitation function. Yet standards going with everyone's benefits cannot be achieved. Obviously, Blake only put forward an assumption, but he did not find a solution, either.

The ideal state of human's soul is much more difficult to achieve. When people are children, they live in an innocent happy state. But living in that state, they are always ignorant and blindly optimistic without regarding of existing woes. Anyhow, no one can bury his head in the sand all the time. As people grow up, the experience state will come sooner or later. Although that state cannot be separated from misery, it teaches people the truth and gives them motivation to get the innocent state back. In Blake's mind, the coming state after the experience state is not a copy of that one in childhood, but a more mature state combining the advantages and dispelling the disadvantages of innocence and experience. So reading his poems, we must pay attention to the experience elements in description about innocence and the super-innocence elements hid in experience.

In addition, both feminism and patriarchy have great influence on Blake's attitudes towards female. In his works, we read poems praising women and encouraging them to get equal rights as men; we also find female images described as shadow of male. The reason is that the time Blake lives in is a time when patriarchy is in the dominant position. No matter how enlightened he is, he cannot free himself totally from the deep-rooted opinions. After all, feminism is a newborn thought stream at that time. Yet Blake is more far-seeing than others. He may know feminism will become a strong force and be clearly conscious that once going to extreme, "female will" will bring disaster. So will "male will". Therefore, what he really wants is a world where female and male co-exist peacefully.



Totally speaking, Blake skillfully creates two quite different worlds in his works and he uses a lot of contrasting symbols. One world is an ideal world, a happy world mainly in *Poetical Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence*; the other world is the world of reality, a miserable world in *Songs of Experience* and other works. His first book *Poetical Sketches*, which was printed in 1783, was written when Blake was from 12 to 20. The book was usually considered to have been much influenced by preceding poets. It could be strongly sensed that the world Blake tries to depict in *Poetical Sketches* is a universe of simple and pastoral gaiety from the angles of religion, morality and humans' soul, an ideal world as it is successfully described by those lyrics in the collection. Blake's originality bursts into full and magical bloom in *Songs of Innocence*, which contains the poems that are apparently written for children. Using a language that even little babies can learn by heart, Blake succeeds in depicting the happy condition of a child before it knows anything about the pains of existence. The poet expresses his delight in the sun, the hills, the streams, the flowers, in the innocence of the child and of the lamb. Here everything seems to be in harmony.

After the mystical joy of innocence, Blake's soul is shaken with a deeper passion: the state of innocence is supplanted by the state of experience. Deeply stirred by what he experienced of the world's hypocrisy and cruelty, Blake speaks out indignantly in *Songs of Experience*. Innocence is Heaven; Experience is Hell (Noyes, 1956: 194). In *Experience* free and joyous love are crushed by cankerous selfishness ("builds a Hell in Heaven's despite")(Noyes, 1956: 197), and by the prohibitions of a tradition-ridden priesthood ("Thou shalt not is writ over the chapel door of love")(Noyes, 1956: 198). In *Experience*, the innocent laughter of children is silenced by interfering adults, and the children's frail bodies are exploited by a hardened society (Frye, 1947: 2). The church remains apathetic to gross abuses; the state supports the vested interests. To Blake, the social evils he beheld are an intolerable national disgrace. Although he did not at the time find his way to a solution, but in *Songs of Experience* he bitterly voiced his indignation and compassion. These songs

reverberate with the intensity of his feeling in brilliant denunciatory phrases, tight rhythms, and searing imagery.

Recognizing the contradictions in everything, by a series of contrasting symbols, Blake gives readers a clear impression of the ideal and reality in his mind. So when we are appreciating Blake's works, it is natural to think him self-contradictory, for he can always see things objectively from different angles. He taught us not only the art of poetry but also the art of thoughts. In a way, he is rather a philosopher than a poet.

## 6.2 Limitations

Due to the limit of the space, time, referential materials as well as the researcher's own ability, the thesis is far from satisfaction.

First, the researcher is not majored in philosophy or logic, so the understandings of law of contradiction may be not complete.

Second, the researcher talked about four themes and quoted many lines from Blake's poems so as to prove that there exist many self-contradictions in his works universally. Yet that seems the analysis of those themes is not detailed or profound, and too many lines from different works are used without a focus on one or several main poems.

Third, according to the themes of poems, the analysis is divided into four chapters. Although the researcher demonstrated what they have in common in the final summary, the connection among them is seemingly not so close.

Forth, the researcher has thought about in which order the four themes should be placed in this paper. But, the researcher has not found a better solution.

Fifth, because of the researcher's limited language ability, there must be grammatical mistakes and inaccurate expressions in this thesis.

### **6.3 Questions to be Further Researched**

Many problems are exposed in this thesis, but they also provide us some questions to be further researched.

To begin with, law of contradiction originates from philosophy. Though it has been used in many literature criticism articles, the researcher has not found out whether it has a certain name for this method in literature criticism. So, the researcher needs more careful studies.

What's more, this paper analyzes Blake's some poems about religion, morality, human's soul and female. Yet there are still poems with other themes. So law of contradiction can also be used to probe into Blake's attitudes towards other issues.

Thirdly, when composing this paper, the researcher found it interesting to explore the reasons why Blake is so self-contrary. Because of limited space and time, as well as the researcher's ability, only a little was discussed. In fact, many factors will affect a writer's style, such as social background, education, thought trends, life experience so and so forth. That is well worth further researches.

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