

The notion of duality of the human soul in william



The Notion Of Duality Of The Human Soul In William Blake's Songs Of Innocence And Experience Tembong Denis Fonge Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience generally subscribe to the main stream appreciation that they present the reader with two states of the human condition - the pastoral, pure and natural world of lambs and blossoms on the one hand, and the world of experience characterized by exploitation, cruelty, conflict and hypocritical humility on the other hand. However, Blake's songs communicate experiences that go beyond the ordinary, to demonstrate that the human soul essentially, is like a two sided coin.

This makes it difficult to give the poems simplistic treatment as may be suggested by the simplicity of language and form of the songs. On this score, I strongly identify with Shadrack Ambansom's opinion that " it would therefore be myopic to consider Blake as a simple poet... indeed no poet who was capable of presenting penetrating studies of the devious and treacherous human heart as ' The Human Abstract', and ' A Poison Tree' etc can be called simple" (24). Blake, like Marlowe in Dr. Faustus, exhibits in his Songs of Innocence and Experience that the human soul has a dual nature, essentially made up of both the good and evil phases.

Songs of Innocence for example, do not only represent the innocence of the human soul at its early stage of life called childhood, but also describe the spiritual attachment of the soul to its creator. Blake attaches extreme importance and gives orthodox treatment to this divine connection between the creator and his creation. In the same vein, Northrop Frye thinks " when we say that the goal of human work can only be accomplished in eternity"

(58) it means that the cot that binds man to his creator goes beyond the physical.

On the other hand, Songs of experience represent the inherent evil side of the soul. The human spirit, Blake seems to suggest, possesses this dual nature of the good and evil from inception or creation. Therefore the ability to do good or evil is inherently present in man and only needs to be tickled by favourable factors or circumstances to give the required expectations. In this, Blake seems to be saying that good and evil complementarily exist in the heart of man, separated only by a thin layer.

It is important to note that the lasting consequence of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden establishes the foundation of evil in the soul. The bible confirms this where it says " Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5. 12). This reveals the soul as having dual character - that of possessing the capacity to do good and evil. Blake explores this knowledge of the genesis of creation to project the two sides of the individual represented by innocence and experience.

Innocence echoes the original life of man before the fall while experience echoes the adulterated life after the fall. " The Divine Image" for example, illustrates how the poet uses personification to dramatize Christ's mediation between God and Man. Beginning with abstract qualities (the four virtues of Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love), the poet makes these abstractions the object of human prayer and piety. The poem does not explicitly mention Christ, but

the four virtues that Blake assigns alternately to man and God are the ones conventionally associated with Jesus.

Because Christ was both God and man, he becomes the vehicle for Blake's mediation between the two. From this perspective therefore, Blake reveals the very conception of the human being by his creator, by re-echoing the Biblical assertion that God created man in His image. " And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (Gen. 1: 26). If man was made in God's image, then the attributes of God - mercy, pity, peace and love are possessed by man and so constitute part of human nature.

In the same light, Blake argues that the presence of these virtues in man make him a reflection of God who is an incarnation of love. Bible makes this point clearer where it points out to the fact that " he that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4: 8). Thus, where mercy, pity, peace and love dwell there God dwells too. The existential question - " who made thee? " posed in " The Lamb" by the child is crucial because it taps into the deep and timeless questions that all human beings pose, about their own origins and the nature of creation.

Of course through this Blake creates the traditional Christian belief where (man) the creation must be linked somehow to (God) the creator. The lamb of course symbolizes Jesus. The traditional image of Jesus as a lamb underscores the Christian values of gentleness, meekness, and peace. The image of the child is also associated with Jesus: in the Gospel, Jesus displays a special solicitude for children, and the Bible's depiction of Jesus in his childhood shows him as guileless and vulnerable. These are also the

characteristics from which the child-speaker approaches the ideas of nature and of God.

If we consider John Holloway's opinion in "Blake: The Lyric Poetry", we understand clearly the notion of the duality of the soul, where he refers to "The Human Abstract" as a poem which "asserts that the conventional Christian virtues like 'Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love' are parasitic on evil and bring it about." He contends that "The Human Abstract", and "A Divine Image," must be read together. Read together, I suppose, our sense of the constituent parts of the soul will be more glaringly clear.