Blake’s Dialectical Vision

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Abstract

This paper discusses William Blake’s notion of vision first. Then it shows that Blake’s vision of this world is a dialectical vision. Blake’s dialectic is somewhat different from Hegel’s. While Hegel’s opposites seem to disappear in a higher synthesis, Blake’s contraries always remain there as a momentum of progression. For Blake contrariety is not the same as negation. So in Blake’s world there is a profound sense of oppositions which never cancel each other. The contraries may be Innocence and Experience, Devourer and Producer, Heaven and Hell, Reason and Energy, etc., but they are forever like male and female in that there may be domination between the opposites, but they are complementary; the contraries may constitute cyclical phases, but they coexist in all phases. The ever-changing binary opposition is Blake’s typical Romantic idea, and it has so mastered him that in his works all concepts involving the number three or four can always be reduced to two basal dialectical concepts, no matter whether we consider Blake’s career, theme, imagery, genre, tone, or even naming of personages.

Key Words and Phrases: 1. vision  2. dialectic  3. contrary  4. negation  
5. binary opposition  6. cycle
William Blake (1757-1827) is generally considered the first important figure among "the visionary company" that advanced the English Romantic Movement. His importance in this respect is largely due to the fact that as a true Romantic he upheld the value of vision and expressed his own particular vision of the universe compellingly in his works. Today, therefore, much scholarship has been devoted to the study of Blake's visionary works in connection with his notion of vision. However, have we fully realized the nature of his particular vision? Owing partly to the difficulty of his mythical system, perhaps, the majority of his readers seem to be still groping for light in the dark corner of his vision.

A vision is a particular experience in which a personage, thing, or event appears vividly or credibly to the mind, although not actually present, under the influence of a divine or other agency. Almost all Romantic writers, including Rousseau, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Ugo, etc., have had visions of one sort or another. Actually, many writers, like William Langland (the hypothetical author of *Piers Plowman*), have claimed that certain works of theirs are based entirely on visions. It is said that at the age of four Blake once envisioned the face of God pressed against the window, and by the time he was eight the occurrence of visions had become habitual to him. Blake's visionary faculties, as critics may agree, naturally found expression in his art theories and practices.

Blake makes his fullest, though somewhat cryptic, remarks on vision in his essay titled "A Vision of the Last Judgment." Therein he says, "The Last Judgment is not Fable or Allegory but Vision." Then he goes on to explain:

Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is Formed by the daughters of Inspiration who in the aggregate are called Jerusalem. Fable is Allegory but what Critics call The Fable is Vision itself. The Hebrew Bible & the Gospel of Jesus are not Allegory but Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that Exists. Note here that Fable or Allegory is Seldom without
some Vision. Pilgrim's Progress is full of it, the Greek Poets the same; but Allegory & Vision ought to be known as Two Distinct Things & so called for the Sake of Eternal Life. (Erdman 554)¹

Here we see three points. First, for Blake vision is no different from imagination, or, as we may infer, vision is but a special kind of imagination. Second, vision is a power to see the permanent rather than the temporary, as it represents "what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeable." Third, vision is prophetic or, as Harold Bloom may prefer to call it, apocalyptic because with the aid not of memory but of inspiration it is to reveal a Jerusalem of eternal life.

The three points are all pertinent to Romanticism. For all Romantics extol vision or imagination in slighting fable or allegory. All Romantic truths are supposedly permanent or eternal truths. And Romantic poets often regard themselves as seers or prophets. But the second point is particularly pertinent to our present discussion.

Emphasizing the permanency of vision, Blake says in the same essay:

The Nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination is very little Known & the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images is considered as less permanent than the things of Vegetative & Generative Nature; yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce, but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies, but renews by its seed. Just so the Imaginative Image returns by the seed of Contemplative Thought. The Writings of the Prophets illustrate these conceptions of the Visionary Fancy by their various sublime & Divine Images as seen in the Worlds of Vision. (Erdman 555)

This argument shows that for Blake a vision is a constant image kept in the imaginative mind for good. So his conclusion is:

This world of Imagination is the World of Eternity; it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated
body. This World of Imagination is Infinite & Eternal whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation is Finite & for a small moment Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. (Erdman 555)

The last statement in the above quotation tells Blake’s idea of the relationship between the visionary world and the physical world. Plainly the latter is for Blake a mere reflection of the former. Thus, one question arises: How can we arrive at the visionary world if not through the corporeal eye which sees only the physical world? Blake evades this question by simply saying: "I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro it & not with it" (Erdman 566). Blake never doubts, as a phenomenologist or post-structuralist critic will do today, that the perceptive organ as a medium of perception is so "transparent" that no perception is untrustworthy. That is why in his letter to Dr. John Trusler he maintains that

...to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination & I feel Flattered when I am told so.

Since this world is to Blake "all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination," what, then, is his vision of this world like? Is it a picture of something eternal and unchangeable as he seems never to have ceased to talk of what he has envisioned? Paradoxically, the answer is both positive and negative. For, as I will demonstrate below, Blake’s vision is a dialectical vision. In his vision the one eternal verity is: this world is unchangeably changing!

To say Blake’s vision is a dialectical vision is to invite an explanation of the term "dialectic." In Hegel’s philosophical system, as we know, history is not static
but contains a rational progression, a dialectical process in which a given concept (thesis) necessarily generates its opposite (antithesis) and interacts with it to reach a reconciliation (synthesis), which then becomes a new thesis to start a new cycle of conceptual interaction and reconciliation. So, in Hegelian dialectic "no single concept, not even the highest, represents the whole truth; all concepts are only partial truths; truth or knowledge is constituted by the entire system of concepts, every one of which has evolved from a basal concept" (Thilly 481).

Now, is Blake's vision dialectical in the Hegelian sense? Not exactly, of course. Blake certainly has the habit of viewing things from two contrary angles. Hence, "binary opposition" becomes his way of thinking, and it engenders such contrasting pairs of concepts as Innocence vs. Experience and the Prolific vs. the Devouring in his mind. Also, Blake certainly takes the interaction of contraries as a momentum of progression. Hence his most famous sayings: "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence" (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Plate 3). However, as some critics have already pointed out, Blake is unlike Hegel in that his contraries do not disappear in some sort of higher synthesis; nor do they change their identities in the dialectical process, as Hegel's opposites do (Nurmi 63). When Blake talks of the Marriage of Heaven and Hell, for instance, he does not mean that either Heaven or Hell is annulled in the "marriage"; nor does the "marriage" give birth to any "offspring" much unlike the heavenly or the hellish. While religion "seeks to end the warfare of contraries because it claims to know a reality beyond existence, Blake wants the warfare to continue because he seeks a reality within existence" (Bloom 55).

It follows, therefore, that Blake sees no mutual negation between his thesis and antithesis. In fact, "Blake comes to see negation not as the interplay of opposites, but rather as a principle that stands outside of the contraries" (Damrosch 180). And in truth he regards negation as a "false Body" that "must be put off & annihilated".

There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
The Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries
The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway.

\textit{(Milton 40: 32-37)}

There is a certain contradiction, indeed, in Blake's wanting contraries without
negation. Yet, it is not hard to understand that in Blake's mind there may be dif-
ferent kinds of contraries, "some of which are easily reconciled, others with great
difficulty if at all" (Damrosch 181). Anyway, forBlake contraries are to be distin-
guished from negations.

Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:
But Negations Exist not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs
Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever.

\textit{(Jerusalem 17: 33-35)}

While thus distinguishing contraries from negations, Blake makes Los declare: "my
Emanation, Alas! will become/My Contrary" \textit{(Jerusalem 17: 388-39)}. So, as M. H.
Abrams has observed, for Blake the severed female Emanation is the central type
of the contrary to the male. But "all contraries, in Blake, operate as opposing yet
complementary male-female powers which, in their energetic love-hate relationship,
are necessary to all modes of progression, organization, and creativity, or procre-
ativity" (260).

With this understanding, then, we can see how far Blake has let his con-
traries go to accomplish his dialectical vision of this world. First of all, we find
Blake's earliest work, \textit{Poetical Sketches}, has already shown signs of his conscious-
ness of the co-existence of opposing forces in the world. In "To the Evening Star,"
for example, the poet asks Venus to protect the flocks because he knows that even
in evenings of love and peace, "Soon, full soon. . . the wolf rages wide, /And the
lion glares thro' the dun forest" (10-12). The flock-wolf-lion imagery in this early
poem naturally brings us to the two famous contrasting poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" in Songs of Innocence and Experience.

It is surely redundant to mention that Blake's songs of innocence and songs of experience represent "two contrary states of the human soul," as the poet himself tells us. Still, some significant points can be made about those most widely-read poems of Blake's. First, although in the songs of innocence the poet assumes the stance that he is writing "happy songs/Every child may joy to hear" ("Introduction" to the Songs, 19-20), the poems do not all depict a happy, innocent world; many of them—e.g., "The Little Black Boy" & "The Chimney Sweeper"—incorporate injustice, evil, and suffering. This shows Blake's understanding that although we can look at our world with an innocent eye, we must acknowledge that this world is forever a composite of good and evil, joy and sorrow, peace and violence, etc., a world in which God makes both the lamb and the tiger.

In such a dualistic world, Blake does not encourage us to remain innocent, however. In his later writings, most notably in "The Book of Thel," Blake suggests that naive innocence must of necessity pass through and assimilate the opposite state of experience and reach the third state called "organized innocence," which comprehends but transcends the first two states, if one is to arrive at perfection. This idea brings Blake closer to Hegel's idea of synthesis. Besides, it shows that in Blake's dialectic there are two opposing worlds, the real world of change where innocence and experience exist together, and the ideal world of permanence where no distinction of innocence from experience is necessary as they have become an organized whole. As a Romantic, Blake naturally hopes that mankind can all transcend the former world and enter the latter with the aid of imagination.

Blake's Romantic aspiration for eternity will become clear if we follow some critics to consider "The Book of Thel" as a debate between the Neoplatonic and the alchemical philosophies. D. G. Gillham argues that in the poem Thel, who fears to descend into generation and lose her immortal nature, represents the Neoplatonic doctrine while the alchemical beliefs are put forward by the Lilly, Cloud, and Clod of Clay, who are content to accept the transience of mortal forms and the cycle of
nature (172). In view of this, then, "The Book of Thel" contains a dialectic of two antique cosmic ideas—those of change and permanence.

The change/permanence contrast is in actuality best illustrated in Blake's mythology concerning the Universal Man and the Four Zoas. In Blake's mythical system, as we know, man's fall is a fall not away from God but into division, in the course of which the all inclusive Universal Man in Eden is first broken up into exiled parts called the "Four Mighty Ones" or the Four Zoas, who then divide again sexually into male Spectres and female Emanations. The Universal Man in Eden is in a permanent, unfallen state of being while the Four Zoas stay then in three successively lower states in the fallen world which Blake calls Beulah, Generation, and Ulro. For one to leave the fallen world of change and return to the unfallen world of permanent perfection is for one's divided parts of selfhood to come back to the original, undivided Universal Man, or to accomplish "his resurrection to Unity."2

Blake's mythology as such obviously implies that contrariety comes to our fallen world as a necessary result of our repeated division. Before mankind falls, there is no dialectical progression at all, since the Universal Man has no opposing parts in itself to war against each other. But after the fall, the Four Mighty Ones as well as the two sexes called Spectre and Emanation simply cannot escape dialectical progression, since they are contraries in one way or another.

It may be easy to identify the male Spectre and the female Emanation as two opposites involved in dialectical processes in this world. But how can we account for the three fallen states and the Four Zoas in terms of dialectics? Do the numbers three and four give us any trouble, as a dialectic can only take the number two for its logic?

In fact, the three successively lower states of being in the fallen world are but two extremes plus one mean between the two extremes. On one hand, we have the extreme of Beulah, which, typifying Blake's heaven on earth, is a pastoral condition of easy and relaxed innocence. On the other hand, we have the extreme of Ulro, which, typifying Blake's hell on earth, is a bleak world of tyranny, nega-
tion and isolated selfhood. Then we have the unhappy (rather than "happy") mean of Generation, which, typifying our normal life on earth, is a realm of common human experience, with both heavenly pleasures and hellish sufferings. So, when we the fallen ones move in the cycle of the three states, we are actually changing between two opposing extremes only, thus actually moving in a dialectical process.

Next, about the Zoas. In *Jerusalem* we find these lines:

They saw their Wheels rising up poisonous against Albion
Urizen, cold & scientific: Luvah, pitying & weeping
Tharmas, indolent & sullen: Urthona, doubting & despairing
Victims to one another & dreadfully plotting against each other
To prevent Albion walking about in the Four Complexions.

(43:1-5)

And the Four Zoas are Urizen & Luvah & Tharmas & Urthona
In opposition deadly, and their Wheels in poisonous
And deadly stupor turn’d against each other loud & fierce.

(74:4-6)

These lines tell clearly that the Four Mighty Ones are forever in conflict with each other just as the contraries in a dialectic. Since the Four Zoas represent reason, passion, sensation and instinct, respectively (Ostriker, *Complete Poems*, 1048), they lend themselves easily to psychological interpretations. W. P. Witcutt, for instance, regards the gods as "symbols of the inner world of man" (20), and discusses convincingly the conflicts among the Zoas as the conflicts between intuition and thought, between thought and feeling, between intuition and feeling, between intuition and sensation, between thought and sensation, and between feeling and sensation (69-91). So, in Witcutt's study the Four Zoas are two pairs of conflicting contraries at any time or two dialectics working at once with four opposites.

Regarding the names of the Zoas, V. A. De Luca has an interesting study bearing on our present discussion. De Luca sets the names up in a diagrammatic
scheme with Luvah opposing Tharmas on the east-west axis and Urthona opposing Urizen on the north-south axis. Then he explains thus:

The North-South axis, Urthona-Urizen, distinguishes itself from the East-West, Luvah-Tharmas, by the following properties: the names in the first pair each have three syllables, those of the second, two; the first pair is marked by identity of the first syllable (Ur) and differentiation in the remaining syllables, whereas Luvah-Tharmas match final syllables through assonantal rhyme but vary initially; the first pair begins with vowels, the second with consonants; the first pair is vocally rich, containing in the two names all five vowels, the second pair vocally poor, sharing only the two back vowels a and u. To this opposition generated between the two directional axes, we must add oppositions between the poles of each axis. (131)

So, phonetically the naming of the Zoas also implies dialectical oppositions.

At this point it may behoove us to examine some significant lines in a poem Blake copied out in a letter of November 1802 to Thomas Butts. In that poem Blake at first claims that a double vision is always with him: "With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey/With my outward a Thistle across my way" (28-30). But in the end he claims that he has a fourfold vision though the vision can be threefold, too, and he hopes that we can be kept from a single vision.

Now I a fourfold vision see
And a fourfold vision is given to me
Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And threelfold in soft Beulah's night
And twofold always. May God us keep
From Single vision & Newton's sleep. (83-88)

These six lines, along with the two aforequoted lines, show that Blake thinks of a poetic genius as someone possessing more than a single view of the world. To him
a poetic genius must have at least a spiritual (inward) eye in addition to his material (outward) eye. Furthermore, if the poet is imaginative enough, he may be able to see the world in four different ways at once. The four ways are actually correlated to Blake's four states of human existence: Ulro, which is purely material (Newtonian); Generation, which is more material than spiritual; Beulah, which is more spiritual than material; and Eden, which is purely spiritual. Thus considered, the fourfold vision actually involves a dialectic of the material and the spiritual. Again, the four ways are correlated to the Four Zoas. For, in Blake's mythology, Urizen, Luvah, Tharmas, and Urthona respectively stand for reason (thought), passion (feeling), sensation, and instinct, which are four faculties a poet can employ to view this world. Now, the Four Zoas or the four faculties, as we have discussed above, are two pairs of contraries for dialectical processes among themselves.

Up to now, it must be clear that for Blake or in Blake, the number 3 or 4 is, in the final analysis, not originally three or four; it is actually derived or developed from 2, the basic number denoting the constitution of any dialectic. If we bear this in mind, we may then be able to realize Blake's dialectical vision even more comprehensively.

Take the flower trilogy for example. It is often noted that the concurrence of "My Pretty Rose Tree," "Ah! Sun-flower," and "The Lilly" on the same page of Songs of Experience (Plate xxiii) is not simply to fill up a page with brief poems about flowers. Yet, critics simply cannot agree as to what this flower trilogy signifies. For instance, John E. Grant holds that "the poems evidently present a threefold definition of love" (333), but he cannot accept Joseph H. Wicksteed's symbolic interpretations either to identify the flowers with "earthly love, poetic love, and Human Love" or to associate the three poems with "Innocence, Vision, and Experience," although he thinks it plausible to connect the trilogy with Dante's three states of the afterlife — "transgression and pain," "holy and purifying aspiration," and "beatitude" (333). I think both Grant and Wicksteed have been led away by the number "three." For me Blake's three flower poems actually contain two dialectical sets: one is a dialectic between "My Pretty Rose Tree" and "The Lilly," and the
other is a dialectic between "Ah! Sun-flower" and the other two poems. In the first set, the rose symbolizes impure human love or love with pains: "But my Rose turned away with jealousy: /And her thorns were my only delight" (7-8). In contrast, the lilly symbolizes pure human love or love without pains since "Nor a thorn nor a threat stain her beauty bright" (4). On the next level, then, the sun-flower is in contrast with both the rose and the lilly because it yearns for neither pure nor impure human love, and it seems to have passed the transient world of sufferings, "where the youth pined away with desire, / And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow " (5-6). In other words, as it is "weary of time" (1), the sun-flower is beyond human love, not in love like the rose or the lilly. So, it is obvious that Blake has meant to portray the contrary states of human love through the three flowers in two dialectics.

In interpreting the flower symbolism as such, I am aware that I risk suggesting that the three "states" of human love are each stable and static. In fact, that is not Blake's vision. We must remind ourselves that Blake's vision is a dialectical one, in which the contrary states are each changing all the time. One is never purely innocence or experience itself. Rather, one's innocence or experience is increasing or decreasing in every phase of life. Likewise, human love is never purely delight or pain. Rather, it is sometimes more delightful than painful or vice versa. That is to say, it is always a combination of what the rose and the lilly stand for. To escape this dialectic of delight and pain is to leave this world. The sun-flower is trying to do that, but it may not know that its aspiration actually involves another dialectic with "time" and "eternity" or "human love" and "divine love" as its two opposites.

Blake's notion of dialectical change is best exemplified by "The Mental Traveller," which, according to Abrams et al., is related to Blake's assertion that "Man passes on but States remain forever" (74, note 1). The poem, as we know, is a travelogue of a visitor, the Mental Traveller, who comes from the eternal realm of imagination to our fallen, temporal world. The travelogue shows that the visitor discovers in our existence a double revolving cycle. On one hand, there is what
scholars call "the Orc cycle," in which the spontaneous, all-demanding, rebellious infant Orc ages inevitably into the rigid, materialistic and isolated old man, Urizen, who then reverts to infancy and so begins the cycle anew. On the other hand, complementary and opposite to the male cycle, there is "the female cycle," which moves "from an old, cruel, oppressive mother figure (or wicked stepmother), through the form of mistress and prolific wife, to that of female infant, and on to oppressive crone again (Abrams, et al., 74, note 1). These revolving cycles impressively demonstrate the three changing phases seen in Beulah, Generation, and Ulro. The three phases or states certainly remain forever. Yet, in a human individual or mankind's entire culture, the dialectical opposites (male vs. female, youth vs. age) cannot refrain from showing changes in phases.

Dialectical contraries coupled with cyclical change in phases seem to be a mode of thinking habitual to Blake all his life. Therefore, the circle is an important image in Blake's world. It is noted that in Jerusalem he uses the symbol of the wheel ambiguously with two sets of associations:

One association is with the vehicular form "of imaginative mechanism, the furnace-chariot belonging to Los and Luvah; the other is with the spinning wheel and loom belonging to Enitharmon and Vala; and the meaning of the symbol may relate either to the power of civilization which invented the wheel or to the sense of an inscrutable fate, depending on whether Los and Enitharmon, or Luvah and Vala, are in charge of it. (Frye 380-1)

In point of fact, the ambiguity here denotes a dialectical contrast between the furnace-chariot and the spinning wheel. And the four figures who are in charge of the two things also form dialectical contrasts among themselves.

Blake's cyclical and dialectical thinking manifests itself not only in his well-known works but also in his rarely-studied works. In a manuscript fragment called An Island in the Moon, for example, Brenda Webster finds Blake illustrating the formation of a vicious psychological cycle. In this work, a mother refuses to let
her infant suck presumably because of his biting. This refusal is then followed by even greater aggression and creates a sadistic cycle continuing through the generations. One important fact in this cycle is: "Each member is victim and aggressor in turn, and the mode of aggression of each recapitulates the others as the surgeon's cutting is the adult enactment of the infant's biting" (Webster 15). This story of parent-child conflict is, moreover, indicated in "juxtaposing pure lyric and gargantuan smut," which, though confusing to readers, can be taken as "characteristically Blakean effort to resolve recurrent internal conflicts" (Webster 9). So, the dialectical content of parent-child conflicts is intensified by the dialectical form of juxtaposing two contrasting styles.

In many facets, indeed, has Blake managed to make his dialectical thinking felt. Take *Milton* for example. Susan Fox observes:

The central structural and thematic issue of *Milton* is the progressive contrariety of equal but opposite forces. That contrariety is represented principally in two pairs of characters, the brothers Rintrah and Palamabron and the conjugal couple Milton and Ololon. The action of the poem is the reconciliation of contraries which have been severed by the perpetuation of the original error of the fall and the vehicle of that reconciliation is the union of Milton and Ololon, which consolidates a complex of unions gathering throughout the poem. (83)

Fox then goes on to assert that the union of Milton and Ololon is "an affirmation of the necessary mutuality of contraries" (83). And then she discusses the "Re-deemed" Palamabron in comparison with the "Reprobate" Rintrah.

While Fox sees dialectical contrariety in the characterization of *Milton*, Kay and Roger Easson see it in the two-book structure of the work. They believe Blake structured *Milton* in two books (with Book I being the male journey and Book II, the female journey) in order to redeem John Milton's dualism.

The two-book structure of *Milton* represents the contrary states Blake
saw as necessary for spiritual progression and energetic existence. The contraries oppose the notion of duality, an either/or relationship between opposites, which inevitably results in the tyranny of one over the other, a situation, of course, pervading Natural Religion. In dualism there is no progression; there is merely a fluctuation between opposite poles. The eternal Milton's journey in Book I and Olool's journey in Book II parallel each other and create the union of the contraries of male and female, creator and emanation, human and divine. (160)

Besides finding dialectical contrariety in the two-book structure of Milton, the Easons also find that "Blake also stresses the contrary states in the narrative's three-part thematic pattern":

The three divisions (more or less equal in length, depending upon which copy of Milton is read) have overlapping implications. These divisions depict the three stages of a spiritual journey, the three thematic divisions of Paradise Lost, and Milton's three classes of men in Paradise Lost. Milton called his three classes of men the Elect, the Reprobate, and the Redeemed. In these labels Blake felt Milton concealed the forms of Satan, Sin, and Death. Blake has the three divisions reflect his three classes of men which he, like Milton, calls the Elect, the Reprobate, and the Redeemed. Unlike Milton, Blake's three classes are not judgemental or dualistic; they are the two contrary states (the Redeemed and the Reprobate) and the negation (the Elect). (163)

Here we may note in passing that as already mentioned above, negation and contrariety are different to Blake: the two notions actually can form another pair of dialectical opposites.

We may pursue Blake's dialectical vision even further in his "composite art." As we all know, Blake did three kinds of artistic work: writing, painting, and engraving. They were all "available ways of externalizing or objectifying his inner
life" or of "recounting his vision" (Punter 3). But basically, we may say, Blake's works are the composite art of text (the result of writing) and design (the result of painting and engraving). Between text and design, then, there is a visual-verbal dialectic. For it is clear that "by the engraving stage text and design had often become so intricately related that neither could be fully interpreted without reference to the other" (Lindsay 12). According to W. J. T. Michell, "To open one of Blake's books is to be confronted with two equally compelling art forms, each clamouring for primary attention... but that in general Blake moves toward a balance of pictorial and poetic elements" (13). There may be the independence of design from text in the presence of illustrations which do not illustrate (e.g., the frontispiece to Songs of Experience). Nevertheless, "other, subtler kinds of visual-verbal independence and interplay occur — as, for instance, when Blake plays text and design off against one another, an effect rather like counterpoint in music, or, more precisely, like the interaction of image and sound in cinema" (9). An example Michell gives of this is in Plate 8 of America [6], where the text begins with the words "The terror answered: I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree: printed on a cloud bank which hangs over the sea. But seated on this cloud bank, we find not the youthful Orc but the aged Urizen, his political equivalent (9). From this example and others we can see all of Blake's pictures "are in some way related to texts" (18). And for Blake, "poetry and painting were to be multiplied by one another to give a product larger than the sum of the parts, a reality which might include, but not be limited by, the world of space and time" (31).

In truth, even Blake's entire poetic career can be viewed in the light of dialectics. We know Blake wrote three genres: lyrics, short prophetic poems, and major Prophetic Books. But, to be sure, "an overview of Blake's works shows us two contrasting ambitions: the ambition which leads to the highly compressed forms of the lyric, and the other ambition which moves towards the completion of an English epic" (Punter 14). This fact means that Blake's imagination is both lyrical and epical, although one may assume that in his earlier career he was more lyrical than epical and in his later life he became more and more epical than lyrical. In other
words, the lyrical and the epical in him undergoes a dialectical change in his whole career.

Viewed from another angle, Blake can also be said to have written the genres of verse and prose. Regarding this, Alicia Ostriker says: "in Blake's work there is a vicious wrestling between verse and prose, in which bones are broken and muscles horribly twisted, but neither side ever wins" (Vision and Verse, 209). Ostriker's metaphor here may be justified in its own right. However, my opinion is: like the blending of the lyrical and the epical, the blending of verse and prose in Blake is an indication of his dialectical synthesis, which, negating neither, only strengthens the bond.

Viewed from still another angle, Blake's works can also be said to belong to the two special genres: pastoral and satire. As Blake refers us to the two states of innocence and experience, so he addresses us in both the mild tone of pastoral and the severe tone of satire. And just as the two states imply each other, so the two tones complement each other throughout his writing career, if only one tone may dominate over the other at times.

Finally, as Michael Ferber suggests, Blake's whole life seems to be a struggle to reconcile the Hebraic ear-oriented temporal sense and the Hellenic eye-oriented spatial sense (182-3). Indeed, we can hardly say that Blake has any religion. Yet, he does anticipate an eternal kingdom like any religious man. In his aspiring for that kingdom, however, we find even his eternity is a dynamic one (Ferber 180). His Eden is "the reverse of Christianity's static and aristocratic heaven" (Fuller 223). In his perpetually dynamic republic, dialectics are the rule. That is why throughout his poetry "there is a profound sense of oppositions: between different faculties in the human psyche, between different approaches to life, between different interpretations of history" (Punter 14-15). The opposites — be they Reason & Energy, Soul & Body, Restraint & Desire, Angel & Devil, Devourer & Producer, Innocence & Experience, the Neoplatonic & the Alchemical, Heaven & Hell, Temporality & Permanence, Youth & Age, Text and Design, Lyric & Epic, Poetry & Prose, Pastoral & Satire, the Hellenic & the Hebraic, etc. — are all like our two sexes. They can
be synthesized or "married"; they can struggle against or conflict with each other; they can give birth to their composites or "children"; but they can never negate or cancel one another. Their co-existence is a must, although as time goes on one contrary in a pair may be more dominant than the other in the same pair. This ever-changing binary opposition is a Romantic irony. And this is Blake's dialectical vision in particular.

Notes

1. In this paper hereafter proper punctuation marks are added where Erdman leaves the text unpunctuated.
2. This mythical system is clearly explained in M. H. Abrams, et al., p.23.
3. Webster discusses more parent-child conflicts found in such other works of Blake as *Tiriel, Visions of the Daughters of Albion, and America.*

Works Consulted


333-67.