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William Weber Wanderlinde

William Blake's "Contraries" as dialectical irony in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

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Orientadora: Profª. Drª. Maria Rita Drumond Viana

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O presente trabalho em nível de mestrado foi avaliado e aprovado por banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

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To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. (PATER, 2009)

RESUMO

Essa dissertação tem como objetivo propor a utilização da ironia como chave de leitura de *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* de William Blake. Primeiramente, é feita uma breve história de conceitos de ironia, dos quais são especialmente importantes nessa dissertação: a ironia romântica de Friedrich Schlegel e a ironia analisada por David Simpson nas obras dos poetas românticos britânicos. As análises não se atêm somente ao texto dos poemas, mas consideram também os aspectos pictóricos das gravuras, considerando cada poema uma obra híbrida. Primeiramente, poemas individuais da seção "Songs of Innocence" são analisados, em um processo de leitura em três etapas. Esse processo procura encontrar tensões irônicas dentro de cada poema. Numa segunda etapa, os chamados "mirror poems" (dois poemas, um em cada seção do livro, que possuem mesmos títulos ou títulos que revelam antíteses) são analisados, também utilizando um processo de leitura com três etapas. Nesse caso, no entanto, os "mirror poems" são contrastados entre si. Ambos processos de leitura buscam ver se é possível, em seu terceiro momento, atingir uma síntese dialética das duas leituras antagônicas realizadas nas duas primeiras fases. Por fim, é pensado como as análises conseguiram lidar com os conceitos de ironia de Schlegel e Simpson. A conclusão é que dois de três aspectos da ironia de Simpson aparecem com frequência, e que o modo de leitura realizado nas análises possui grande similaridade com o com o conceito de ironia romântica de Schlegel, revelando-se uma produtiva chave de leitura que revela analogias nos processos de criação e leitura de Blake e Schlegel.

Palavras-chave: William Blake. Ironia. Ironia Romântica. Romantismo Britânico. Poesia.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis is to propose the utilization of irony as a key for reading William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Firstly, a brief history of the concepts of irony is made. Two concepts in particular are crucial in this thesis: Fridrich Schlegel's Romantic irony and the irony analyzed by David Simpson in the works of British romantic poets. The analyses do not consider only textual aspects of the poems, and also consider pictorial aspects of the plates, treating each poem as a hybrid work. Firstly, individual poems from the "Songs of Innocence" section are analyzed, in a three-step reading process. This process searches for ironic tensions inside the poems. In a second stage, the so called "mirror poems" (two poems, one in each section of the book, which have either the same titles or reveal an antithesis in the titles) are analyzed, also using a three-step reading process. In this case, the "mirror poems" are contrasted between themselves. Both reading processes, in their third moment, aim at reaching a dialectical synthesis of the two antithetical readings performed in the first two steps. At the end, a reflection on how the analyses were able to deal with the concepts of irony by Schlegel and Simpson is carried out. The conclusion is that two out of three aspects of Simpson's irony frequently appear in the poems, and that the process of reading performed in the analyses bear great similarity with Schlegel's concept of Romantic irony, revealing itself to be a productive key for reading Blake's book, and which reveals analogies in Blake's and Schlegel's processes of creation and reading.

Keywords: William Blake. Irony. Romantic irony. British Romanticism. Poetry.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Songs	*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*
"Innocence"	Section "Songs of Innocence" of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*
"Experience"	Section "Songs of Experience of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

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1 INTRODUCTION

William Blake (1757-1827) was an English poet and artist, and is widely considered one of the first and foremost British Romantics—or sometimes called a proto-Romantic. Not only a writer, he created paintings and engravings, which shared characteristics with his poetic output—including themes often related to religious and/or mystical/occultist subjects. His work as an engraver, in fact, bears an important connection to his literary works: he engraved most of his poems in copper plates, merging the written text with drawing and designs. Utilizing his rolling press, Blake printed reproductions of the copper plates, usually coloring them afterwards, and binding them in books, a process Blake named illuminated printing (VISCOMI; EAVES, 2004, p. 41). The books he printed were the only way to have access to most of his texts in his lifetime.[1] Blake decided not to allow other publishers to print his books, maintaining complete control of the final product, a mixed form of art up to that point unique in the history of literature, with both textual and pictorial information imaginatively merged and presented.[2]

Blake was one of the first eighteenth-century British poets to believe in the power of imagination, instead of relying on reason and classical tastes as a means to write his poetry (ABRAMS, 1971, p. 216). Eighteenth-century England's *zeitgeist*, connected with the primacy of rationalist thinkers such as Newton and Locke, was permeated by the notion of the supremacy of reason. According to M. H. Abrams:

> Like his German contemporaries, Blake waged war against Bacon, Newton, and Locke, and for an alternative to the elementarism and mechanism of 'Philosophy of Five Senses,' turned to the cabalistic tradition, and to Paracelsus, Boehme, Swedenborg, and other occult writers. (1971, p. 216)

While not all British Romantics that followed turned to occult writings, they shared the critique of reason, turning to concepts such as "Poetic Genius"—a notion Blake discussed in his writings. To Blake, it was in fact the real human attribute: "the Poetic Genius is the True Man" (BLAKE, 1988, p. 1).[3] This statement, from the early work "All Religions are One" (1788), seems to be a motto he followed—and sometimes explained—in his works.

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1 The poem "The Tyger," one of the few exceptions to this, was published "in a little book by Benjamin Malkin in 1806" (FERBER, 1991, p. 38).

2 The biographical information from this chapter and others in this introduction is taken mainly from David V. Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* and Michael Ferber's *The Poetry of William Blake*.

3 For the text of Blake's works, I am using *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman, which is currently considered the standard edition of Blake's works. In conformity with Erdman's editorial choices, I will quote Blake's text with his idiosyncratic (mis)spelling and punctuation.

This mystical vein that Abrams highlights, along with more traditional religious texts, were a key characteristic of Blake's art. In fact, he is usually considered a mystical writer, something that recently deceased American critic Harold Bloom acknowledges, but sees as misleading (1963, p. 94). I will come back to this topic, but for now it is important to notice how this mystical vein in Blake's works meant a lot of research about him and his works focus not on literary aspects, but on relations he had with occult and mystical traditions.

Blake had a deep knowledge of the Christian Bible, but also of poets and writers dealing with religious and mystical themes. Some crucial examples are English writer John Milton (1608-1674)—the poet on which Blake based *Milton* (1804), one of Blake's epic poems—and the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), since both appear prominently in his *oeuvre*. Like Milton and Swedenborg before him, Blake's attitude toward religion was not pro-establishment or orthodox; he was not satisfied with how religion was organized in his days, and thought that the primacy of reason of his time diminished and entrapped the religions into systems of order and morality, which served as an effective control of people's freedom, whereas real religion should free humankind (FRYE, 1974, p. 28).

Both the critique of the primacy of reason and of the contemporary Anglican Church are arguably main aspects of his art. They appear, for instance, in what are usually called the *Prophetic Books*, works that are part of a complex mythology created by the author, based on religious texts (the Bible, Swedenborg's works, etc.), literature (such as works by Edmund Spenser and John Milton), and episodes both of his times and private life. His opinions are especially evident, however, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), a sort of manifesto which merges different kinds of discourses in a satirical critique.

Even though such aspects permeate his works, an early collection of small poems, *Songs of Innocence* (1789), brings yet another facet of the author. This seems to be a book for children. Michael Phillips notices, however, some discrepancies between Blake's book and other books for children that were published around the same time. Other books had, like Blake's, engravings accompanying the text—even though not using Blake's technique of illuminated printing. These other books, however, had engravings emphasizing "moral uprightness," with scenes set indoors, and adults teaching children dressed as little adults

(PHILLIPS, 2014, p. 109). The *Songs of Innocence*, conversely, have outdoor scenes, with recourse to lush vegetation, lambs, and children playing in its engravings.

Songs of Innocence in this sense makes a critique, however oblique, of the books for children available during Blake's time. Such critique is in consonance with the earlier mentioned critique of reason and religion, and these aspects will appear at some points in the book's poems. If read like this, *Songs of Innocence* is a book for adults, allowing adult readers to learn from its poems something about childhood and the Innocence of the title, learning from the children and other innocent characters which appear throughout the book. Blake's critique of children's books creates a contrast which can be seen as ironic. Blake brings aspects of the pastoral mode and subverts the educational and moralizing aspects of other books with his focus on play, joy, and innocence. Yet, it may seem strange to perceive as ironic poems which are—or at least seem to be—so earnest in their representation of childhood.

Such a perception becomes complicated—and possibly more valid—when the earlier *Songs of Innocence* standalone is considered beside *Songs of Experience* (1793). Blake himself united both books and, from 1794 on until his death, published both books together as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.[4] Blake added the following cover:[5]

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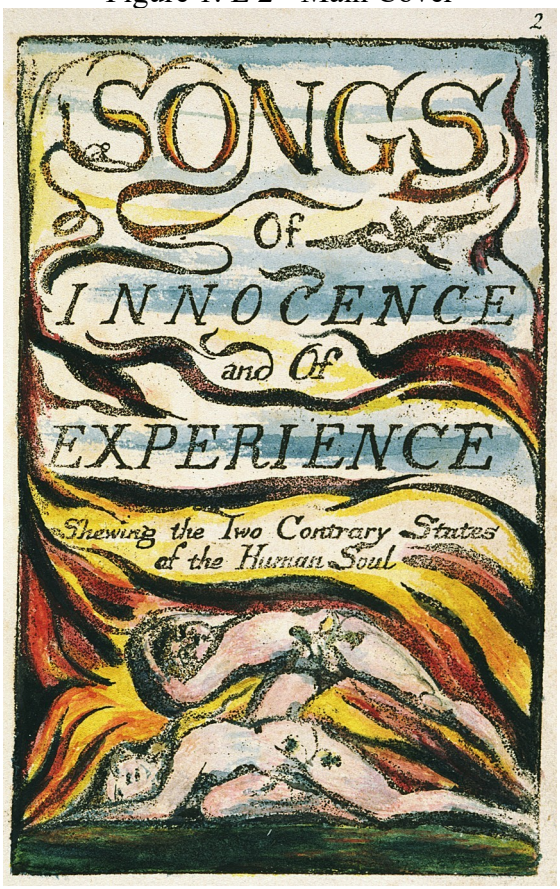
[4] I followed Erdman's textual notes in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* in this paragraph (BLAKE, 1988, p. 790-791).

[5] I will use throughout this thesis Copy L of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The copy is currently at the Yale Center for British Art. For the digital reproductions, I am using the website *The William Blake Archive* (http://www.blakearchive.org), which provides integral access to this copy, in high-resolution images. Different copies are painted differently; because of this I usually do not consider in my analysis the colors of the plates. The title of the picture (L 2 - Main Cover) refers to the copy (L) and the number of the object (12). The same model is used when referring to other plates.

Figure 1: L 2 - Main Cover



Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

The cover depicts Adam and Eve after the fall, with fig leaves already covering their pudenda. If for "Songs of Innocence" the contrast was with other books for children, now the contrast is present within the volume itself, created by putting "Songs of Experience" after "Songs of Innocence."[6] The subtitle ("Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul") emphasizes the contrapuntal aspect of the volume.

If "Innocence" brings a sincere, optimistic take on childhood and on life, expressing throughout a *joie de vivre*, "Experience" brings a pensive, melancholic, sometimes rebellious and desperate mood, more easily associated with maturity. Bloom notes a distinction between Innocence and Experience in the way through which truth is perceived: to him, the state of Innocence "is that state of the human soul in which we ascertain truth as immediate knowledge, for the knower and the known share an unsought natural harmony" (1973, p. 46).

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[6] From here on, I will treat *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, using *Songs* to refer to it, as a single book, with two sections: "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience," which I will refer to as "Innocence" and "Experience" respectively, not to be confused with the states of Innocence and Experience.

Experience, on the other hand, is the state of utter suspicion, which can be sometimes so pervasive as to bring despair. Bloom's distinction makes more evident the way through which Innocence and Experience work as contraries, as the book's subtitle indicates. Their relation, as Blake wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, is not oppositional, but progressive: "Without Contraries is no progression" (BLAKE, 1988, p. 34). The relation, then, can be seen as dialectical, with a better way of experiencing life (since they are "states of the human soul") hovering between Innocence and Experience.

Perhaps Experience's suspicion explain somehow why the most well-known short poems written by Blake, such as "The Tyger" and "London," appear in "Experience," hinting at the general predilection for it.[7] This aspect can make these poems appear more suggestive. This does not mean, however, that poems from "Innocence" are not complex or interesting, and are just plain depictions of Innocence. Since both states work in a progressive way, different aspects of the poems from "Innocence" can be contrasted with aspects of Experience so as to make them more suggestive and complex.

Such complexity can be shown by taking into account the possibility that Blake, by putting speakers in each poem's sections according to the section's state, either Innocence or Experience, is not simply making a case for the speaker's state. Instead, each poem in itself can be analyzed as to how the state being depicted determines the way the speaker acts and perceives the world, and how this can be seen as either positive or negative. If *Songs of Innocence*, when firstly published, did not invite this possibility because of its lack of counterpoint, now in the complete *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, this becomes possible.

In fact, it not only becomes possible, but Blake himself invites this reflection with poems which obviously contrast with each other. These are called mirror poems, which are a set of two poems, one appearing in each section of the book, that deal with the same subject (sometimes even having the same title, such as both poems titled "The Chimney Sweeper," one from "Innocence" and the other from "Experience") or with contraries (as in "The Lamb" and "The Tyger"). A reading of them side by side is illuminating, as a tension between them is created that can enhance readers' interpretations not only of these poems, but also on how the states of Innocence and Experience relate to each other. One of the arguments in this thesis is

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[7] According to Nelson Hilton, "The Tyger" is the most anthologized poem of the English language (2004, p. 207).

that this tension can be interpreted as an ironic tension, with one poem ironizing the other in a dialectical way.

The mirror poems (analyzed in chapter 4) will be crucial in the development of the thesis, but before arriving at the complexities of contrastive analyses, I analyze in chapter 3 several poems from "Innocence." For these poems I bring concerns from the state of Experience into the state of Innocence. Through this, each poem is read ironically, with several aspects of optimism and confidence being subverted by a perspective which tries to understand as irony what it perceives as overly naive and optimistic. It is not the case that the speakers of the poems are being ironic; instead, the speakers' attitudes, which appear in themselves genuine, are read ironically, and what are perceived to be their faults are contrasted with their attitudes. I do not make the same kind of reading for poems from "Experience," first because the poems from this section are more easily connected with irony, both in existing criticism and by the way the speakers present their subjects, being themselves at times overtly ironic. Another reason is that irony, an arguably negative trope, seems to be more suited to Experience and, in this sense, making Innocence ironize Experience does not seem fitting.

Furthermore, my analysis will consider both textual and pictorial aspects, in consonance with more recent criticism on Blake. Claudia R. R. Calado, in her doctoral dissertation on the verbal-pictorial creation process of *Songs*, argues that Blake "allies one language to the other [the verbal and pictorial]. He creates image and verb so that they work together, like two instruments in the same orchestra"[8][9] (2012, p. 10). W. J. T. Mitchell in his book *Blake's Composite Art* (1978), argues that picture and text of the illuminated books cannot be separated for a full understanding of them, as Frosch notices in his book review (FROSCH, 1979, p. 40). The designs on the plates, then, do not simply bring a pictorial representation of the poem, a mere illustration which serves as a paratext, something which accompanies the verbal text without being an integral part of it. On the contrary: being printed with Blake's method of illuminated printing, designs and text merge in a hybrid work, and an analysis which considers only the text is lacking. The designs play important, and sometimes different roles in the interpretation: in some poems, the graphic elements emphasize an aspect

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[8] When quoting from texts originally in Portuguese, I bring my translation to the body of the text and add the citation in Portuguese in a footnote, as follows. If the text is originally written in a language other than Portuguese, I also cite the translator(s) the first time I quote from the given book/text.

[9] "O que ele faz é aliar uma linguagem a outra. Cria imagem e verbo para que funcionem juntos, como dois instrumentos dentro de uma orquestra."

of the text; in others they create a contrast—possibly an ironic contrast—with the text, and so on.

I have mentioned irony, but have not yet defined it properly. The concept of irony is explored more deeply in the next chapter. While I bring different concepts of irony, my focus is on the concept of Romantic irony, as set out by the German writer Friedrich Schlegel.[10] Schlegel was Blake's contemporary, and even though most probably they did not read each other, Schlegel's concept of Romantic irony is used as my key to an analysis of the *Songs*. Romantic irony has a dialectical aspect which pairs well with the contrary states of Innocence and Experience. I also consider David Simpson's concept of Romantic irony in the British context, which he develops in his *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* (1979). I will thus call Simpson's concept British Romantic irony to differentiate it from Schlegel's concept. Simpson analyzes British Romantic poets (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats) in order to understand how irony works in their poems, finding in them several common aspects which I analyze in due time.

Before exploring irony, however, I present a very brief history of Blake's reception, making also a review of the works that include analyses of Blake's *oeuvre* and that were invaluable in my interpretation of the poems in chapters 3 and 4.

It took decades after Blake's death for his works to be re-evaluated, since they were almost neglected in his lifetime. Most of the efforts in the nineteenth century were focused on Blake as painter and printmaker. The first biography written about him, by Alexander Gilchrist (1863), for instance, emphasizes such aspects, to the detriment of Blake's poetry. Studies about his work as a poet gave more attention to the shorter poems, mostly neglecting the *Prophetic Books*. *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1866), by Algernon Charles Swinburne, along with W. B. Yeats's and Edwin J. Ellis's editions of Blake's works (1893), which included preface, introduction, and notes, are some of the few early exceptions.[11] It was only in the twentieth century that more all-encompassing readings were attempted.

One of the first consistent interpretations of Blake's literary *oeuvre* was *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), written by Northrop Frye. The book paved the way for a new appreciation

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[10] Even though the term "German" is anachronistic, since there was no unified Germany during Schlegel's lifetime, I am using it not only for matters of simplification, but also because it is with romantics such as Schlegel that the seed for an understanding of national identity was planted.

[11] For more on the reception of Blake's works in the nineteenth century, see *Bloom's Classic Critical Views: William Blake*.

of Blake's works. Frye's main line of interpretation is to treat the whole of Blake's output—mainly his texts—as a unit, applying later concepts and characters to earlier works. While this principle was bound to be criticized because at times it dismisses the evolution of Blake's thought, Frye's engaging interpretation still is a common entry point to Blake's criticism. Of special importance was Frye's contribution to the readings of Blake's later books, the *Prophetic Books*. With their intricate symbolism and a complex mythopoeic aspect, Frye's book was one of the first to offer a systematic reading of them, bringing some needed clarity to what was up to that point mostly seen as hermetic obscurity.

A few years after the publication of *Fearful Symmetry*, another influential Blake scholar, David V. Erdman, published *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1954), which is mainly interested in historical criticism applied to Blake's works. Although Erdman was not averse to the kind of interpretation that Frye undertook, Erdman found several instances of events of Blake's times and of Blake's private life intertwined with his mythopoeic production. Such findings immensely contributed to the interpretation of Blake's works in a biographical context.

The many merits of Erdman's book and its contributions to the study of Blake's works were praised by E. J. Rose: "Future scholarship is bound to assume a talmudic relation to Erdman's midrash on Blake" (1970, p. 48). Blake was not a learned Jewish interpreter, but this metaphor, which puts Erdman's book in an authoritative place, also aptly connects it to a mystical subject. The connection can also be read as a critique of "many myopic Neoplatonic studies" on Blake, more concerned with mysticism and occultism than literature, common in the mid-twentieth century. Rose's prediction also turned out to be true, since "Erdman's midrash of Blake" is considered one of the preeminent books on the author (ROSE, 1970, p. 48).

In this review, Rose also brings what critic Martin Price perceived as a flaw in Erdman's criticism:

> Martin Price wrote that David Erdman had a tendency to convert "Blake's irony too easily into mere expose" and went on to say that there was a kind of "'conversion downwards' that throughout the book seems in effect to invert Blake's figural method into political pamphleteering." (ROSE, 1970, p. 48)

Price's claim, which Rose partly accepts, points to Erdman's tendency to stay too close to the historical approach in his book. In this sense, the ironies exposed by Erdman are most of the time confined to this kind of reading, and neglect other possibilities of interpretation.

Scholars such as Erdman and Frye have paved the way for several other critical works on William Blake. With their efforts, Blake's later books such as *Jerusalem* were no longer "unreadable," and started to be more diligently read. Other books, such S. Foster Damon's *A Blake Dictionary* (1965), which gathers information about Blake's symbolism in the form of a dictionary, were also helpful for readers of Blake.

Harold Bloom's surprisingly humble *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963) is one of the books that came after Frye's and Erdman's, relying heavily on the analyses they developed. Bloom's book is particularly useful in my analyses of the poems, as he is alert to instances of irony in most of Blake's poems, including those in *Songs* and in the *Prophetic Books*. Bloom deals with Blake's poems chronologically, and emphasizes the poetic aspect of Blake's myth. With this he downplays the importance of the mystical aspect of Blake's works, a characteristic that was commonly analyzed at the time—which, as mentioned, was a cause of complaint for several critics. Unfortunately, Bloom decided to put pictorial aspects of the books mostly aside in his analysis, focusing on the English text instead. He acknowledges the problems of doing this in the preface, citing his inability to judge the pictorial aspects and what seems to him as the independence of the texts from the pictures as justifications for his procedure (BLOOM, 1963).

While this decision neglects an important part of Blake's works, Bloom's book is still valuable because of its close reading oriented structure, especially when compared with Frye's. He makes several insightful close readings to ground his interpretations of Blake's textual *oeuvre*. These interpretations do not seem to perish if pictorial aspects are taken into account, but rather can be combined with them, enabling a better appreciation of Blake's books.

Bloom also believes that the *Prophetic Books*, especially *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, are Blake's greatest achievements, a controversial view that guides his book. A lot more print is spent on these later books, instead of earlier and more well-known ones such as *Songs*. While this is valuable for Blake studies in general, at times Bloom treats the earlier books not as works of art complete in themselves, but part of an ongoing one that will culminate in *Jerusalem*—in this sense, his book is similar to Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, which Bloom acknowledges as his main guide for the interpretation of Blake's works.

D. G. Gillham's *Blake's Contrary States* (1966) was particularly useful in the interpretation of the mirror poems. Gillham makes a contrastive analysis of every pair of

mirror poems of the *Songs*. To do so, he even pairs poems which are not so obviously complementary: he pairs, for instance, "The Ecchoing Green" and "London," something I do not do in my analysis—only analyzing "The Ecchoing Green" in chapter 3. Also interesting is Gillham's decision to present a poem from Blake's notebook: another version of "A Cradle Song" exists there, which is patently, one perceives with Gillham's analysis, a song of Experience (GILLHAM, 2009, p. 182). Since I am also interested in pictorial aspects, I chose not to analyze the notebook version of the poem, which only has the written text. In any case, Gillham's contribution in expanding the set of poems of *Songs* with this entry is commendable, as it fits neatly into "Experience" and the logic of the book.

Gillham is not as preoccupied as I am with irony in Blake's poems, although he hints at irony occasionally. What he does is to treat the poems as dramatizing the situations and ideas depicted in them, with each poem of the pair making a claim that the other tries to answer. This mode of reading influenced my way of reading the mirror poems, but I depart from Gillham in some points. Not only am I much more interested in understanding the ironic tension generated in the contrast of the mirror poems, but also I do not believe, as he does, in the primacy of Innocence, since in his readings, Gillham tends to elevate Innocence when contrasted with Experience.

Gillham's is a polemical view, as the other writers I cited tend to more clearly problematize the contrary states, and treat them in a dialectical way suited to the aforementioned distinction of "truth as immediate knowledge" and utter suspicion (BLOOM, 1963, p. 46). Blake himself would extend and make his psychological categories more complex in his later books. In my view, the possibility of what Bloom calls an "organized, higher innocence" seems accurate (1963, p. 20). Martin K. Nurmi explains this further:

> To end in the state of Experience would be to end in cynicism and perhaps despair. But in Blake's scheme there is a third state, that of wise Innocence, which synthesizes the first two […] It is a state of 'organized' Innocence […] a state in which the bitterness of Experience has been met, absorbed, and transcended. (apud SIMPSON, 1979, p. 216)

This higher Innocence, connected by Bloom with the "state of Eden" of Blake's later books, is a sort of dialectical, positive interplay between both Innocence and Experience (BLOOM, 1971, p. 20).

The most recent book on Blake I used in this thesis also complicates the concepts of Innocence and Experience. Leo Damrosch's *Eternity's Sunrise* (2015) is an accessible reading of Blake's works, which brings new critical perspectives to deal with Blake's *oeuvre*.

Damrosch skillfully merges in his book analyses of both written and visual texts, creating in this sense not just a book about Blake the poet or Blake the painter, but instead considers the integrated aspect of his artistic creation.

Damrosch's book is probably intended as an entry point to Blake's *oeuvre*, and for this function it serves very well. However, the way he tackles the mixed art form of Blake's works, and the way he brings contemporary critical perspectives such as feminism and neocolonialism into the discussion, makes *Eternity's Sunrise* not just a Blake reader, but a relevant book in Blake studies. Even though Damrosch seems dismissive of looking for irony in Blake's works, as I am doing, his analyses nevertheless enriched my reading of the *Songs*.

As I am using several mid-twentieth century books, Damrosch's method in *Eternity's Sunrise* feels much more current, and in this sense it thoroughly informs my analyses. If the other books (especially Frye's and Erdman's) are still relevant to Blake studies, Damrosch's insistence in looking at both written and visual texts is not only a more current view, but a vital way of looking at Blake's *oeuvre*. Earlier books were able to disregard visual aspects on the assumption—correct, in my opinion—that the access to them was difficult. Nowadays, however, facsimile editions of Blake's works via *The William Blake Archive* website are widely accessible, and therefore such an assumption must be neglected. In a way, then, I may say that Frye's, Erdman's, Bloom's, and Gillham's books inform my analyses, and *Eternity's Sunrise* works to bring those earlier interpretations into contemporaneity. Also, none of these books deal extensively with irony, especially the specialized concept of Romantic irony. By introducing this concept, my aim is to enrich the reading of *Songs*.

2 CONCEPTS OF IRONY FOCUSING ON ROMANTIC IRONY

The phenomenon of irony is part of the literary experience in many (possibly all) of its beginnings. If we think of the Greek tradition as foundational for most of what came historically to be constituted as the "western tradition," irony was already used by characters in the *Iliad*.[12] The *Pentateuch* also brings examples of different types of ironies (ALEXANDER; BAKER, 2008, p. 543). The trope was employed in early forms of literature, but it was not perceived by early readers as we do. Because the phenomenon was not linked with the loaded word "irony." The link would occur much later (MUECKE, 2008, p. 30).

The word "irony" comes from the Greek word *eironeia*, which appeared first in Plato's Socratic dialogue *Republic* (ca. 380 BCE). Its meaning was negative: it was a way of deceiving others, of fleeing from one's responsibilities, of being impertinently ambiguous and manipulative (MUECKE, 2008, p. 31). In the *Republic,* a sophist calls Socrates an *eiron*, i.e. someone that practices *eironeia*; as I will show, Socrates would be fundamental in later conceptualizations of irony. Aristotle would also touch on the issue, and subsequent Greek and Roman writers interested in irony would comment or complement the former's views. It was the Roman orator Quintilian, in the first century CE, who defined irony as "saying what is contrary to what is meant" (COLEBROOK, 2005, p. 1). In a sense, Quintilian inaugurated a commonsensical view of irony which is still valid, even though nowadays the specialized view on the subject considers it a specific type of irony, called verbal irony.

Such way of looking at irony relies on the apprehension of the phenomenon as a figure of speech. In this sense, irony is rhetorical—in fact, Quintilian explained his concept in a manual on rhetoric. Its effect is local: the irony is developed in one sentence or more, and after that another sentence does not need to use this figure of speech, and the text can continue normally. Every local irony will need to be recognized and understood by the reader for the text to be comprehended as intended. I use the following figure to illuminate the discussion:

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[12] Elizabeth Minchin's "From gentle teasing to heavy sarcasm: Instances of rhetorical irony in Homer's *Iliad*," for instance, exemplifies scenes in which characters speak ironically (MINCHIN, 2010).

Figure 2: "This is fine"

Source: The Verge (2013).

Before commenting on it, I have to say that I use an image, instead of a text, advisedly. My intention is not to analyze pictorial aspects, such as colors, but to show a situation and the character's response to it. I found this image to be an appropriate example to explain different types of irony.

When we read this cartoon, we notice that there is an obvious contradiction between the anthropomorphic dog's words and what is happening, since being inside a burning house, most of us will agree, is not "fine." This contradiction is what triggers our recognition of an incongruence, and hence we can solve the contradiction through an ironic interpretation. Wayne C. Booth, in his valuable *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), terms this solution a "reconstruction." The word is apt if we think of the different sides of the contradiction as not fitting together, and in need of some new way of being assembled.

In the case of this image, readers need to decide how to interpret the irony after recognizing the contradiction. One possibility is that the dog is being ironic. Such interpretation supposes that what the dog is saying is the opposite of what he means. This is verbal irony—as described, for instance, by D. C. Muecke (2008, p. 30). Another possibility is that the dog is not perceiving the fire, or actually thinks that the fire is "fine." In this case, a dramatic irony is reconstructed by the reader—as described by Muecke (2005, p. 30). The dramatic irony occurs, in this case, because of the dog's inability to grasp what is happening as something bad, something that the reader does. Dramatic irony is also termed situational irony or irony of events,[13] because it is the conjunction of a character's words and a situation or event that contradicts them *without* the character grasping the contradiction. The character

[13] By Booth (1975, p. 2), Muecke (2005, p. 30), and Colebrook (2005, p. 13).

is not being ironic, but instead the creator (narrator, authorial voice as organizing principle, or even God) is the one who puts these contradictory terms together for the reader or audience to perceive and understand them as ironic.

I will use another example of dramatic irony, this time from Shakespeare's *Othello*, to make the concept clearer. In the first scene of the play, Iago tells Roderigo about his hatred for Othello ("I do hate him as I do hell pains"), and Iago will try and succeed in destroying Othello's life through the use of manipulation and deception (SHAKESPEARE, 2016, p. 516). A dramatic irony occurs later on, when Iago tells Othello about his love for him ("My lord, you know I love you") and Othello replies positively ("I think thou dost") (SHAKESPEARE, 2016, p. 547). The audience is certain, at this point, of Iago's hatred, and can perceive the contradiction between this hatred and Othello's words. Iago is not being ironic, in the sense that he does not want Othello to interpret his words as a verbal irony. One could say that in this scene Iago feels and enjoys the situational irony by himself, being in this sense closer to the derogatory word *eiron* than to a more contemporary sense of ironist.

These two ways of interpreting the irony of the image, the verbal and the dramatic, are mutually exclusive. This brings to the image an instability of meaning, since both interpretations are possible, but logically (I am thinking here of formal logic) one cannot exist if the other does. However, literature is not rigorously logical, being so much based in subjectivity, and both possibilities can exist at the same time, however paradoxical this might seem.

The image exemplifies an unsolvable instability, something which Booth is combating in his book. The book was written when New Criticism was still a pervasive influence in anglophone academia. New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks, in his influential essay "Irony as a Principle of Structure" (1951), stretched the concept of irony for what was to Booth and other scholars too far. Booth's strategy is to make a defense of what he calls stable ironies, a much narrower concept. Stable ironies are: a) intended by the author; b) covert, since the irony is not stated (e.g. "Isn't it ironic that..."), and needs to be reconstructed by the reader; c) fixed, because after being understood they do not allow the reader to question them; d) finite, as they simply contradict small statements instead of questioning bigger issues, with the field of discourse being "narrowly circumscribed" (BOOTH, 1975, p. 5-6).[14]

[14] I will not discuss here critiques made against Booth's concept of stable ironies because they are out of my scope. It will suffice to say that Linda Hutcheon, in her revealing book on the politics of irony, *Irony's Edge*

The process of reconstruction is for Booth vital. For the readers to understand an irony, they need to reconstruct its meaning. To do so, they need to reach an unacceptable conclusion when reading the sentence at face value. In the figure, the conclusion would be that a burning house is something fine. With that conclusion, the reader would be able to "leap" to a higher level. Booth explains that "the movement is always toward an obscured point that is intended as wiser, wittier, more compassionate, truer, more moral, or at least less obviously vulnerable to further irony" (BOOTH, 1975, p. 36). Booth's sentence displays aspects that can be violated for the conclusion to become unacceptable: truth, morality, wisdom, etc.

The metaphor of the "leap or climb to a higher level" does not fit Quintilian's definition, since Quintilian's contrary would imply a change of sides, not of level. According to Booth, the contraries would imply a dichotomy, whereas the different levels relate to higher levels of apprehension, where a broader perspective is possible (BOOTH, 1975, p. 36-37). This is more suitable to irony, since readers do not choose a side; instead, they grasp a contradiction and reconstruct a meaning that is above the literal meaning. Booth's metaphor of the different levels also allows the possibility of even higher levels, where the irony itself is read ironically, something that is not possible in Quintilian's dichotomous view.

Looking at irony through a rhetorical perspective still is the most usual way of understanding it. In fact, it was the only way until the end of the eighteenth century. Until then, irony was conceived as a rhetorical device, which means that it was considered in regard to its utility for style and/or role in persuasion. It was also much more associated with the verbal irony of Quintilian. However, at the end of the eighteenth century a group of German intellectuals situated in the town of Jena would give another dimension to the word "irony."

Members of this movement, which was later called *Frühromantik* or Jena Romanticism, were influenced by German idealist philosophy, specially by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), and with this philosophical background they would create works in prose and verse, as well as paintings and other arts/media, and develop artistic theories that challenged several aspects of eighteenth-century rationalistic thinking. It was Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) who would develop a theory of artistic creation that put irony in a

(1994), claims that "all ironies, in fact, are probably unstable ironies" (1995, p. 187). Although I tend to agree with Hutcheon, I believe that Booth's concept still is a viable, if not entirely precise, way of explaining verbal irony.

central position. The kind of irony developed by Schlegel[15] and other Jena Romantics came to be known as Romantic irony.[16]

Romantic irony deviates from irony as textual tropes, belonging not to texts, but to the person. Schlegel understood irony "as something like a human condition or predicament" (COLEBROOK, 2005, p. 47). Since for him human life is a process, a continuous becoming, there is always a distance, which he would argue is an ironic one, between the subject and what he/she produces. This product, poetry (explicitly connected with the Greek meaning of *poiesis*, the activity of making something), is the result of a *fall* from the life of becoming, to a fixed, final form. Poetry, then, is not mimetic in the usual sense of copying reality. Instead, poetry itself creates: "the poem is mimetic but it does not copy a thing so much as a process. It creates just as nature creates, and in so creating itself we have the power to see the world in its *becoming*, not just its inert *being*" (COLEBROOK, 2005, p. 47-48). The *fall* was a *felix culpa*, and hence it was not perceived as a bad thing: by "seeing the world in its *becoming*" through poetry a glimpse of the transcendental truth is achieved.

The philosophical background in which this kind of thinking was being made is relevant for understanding the concept. As thinkers of the German idealism, following and improving on Fichte's theory of knowledge (BENJAMIN, 2018, p. 30-31), the Jena Romantics put a great importance in the becoming as opposed to being.[17] The latter was for them too elusive, and could only be apprehended through the becoming. The focus on becoming made the non-static aspects of philosophy prominent, hence the importance of development and dialectics for these thinkers.

In fact, the dialectical aspect of Romantic irony is of special interest. As Steven A. Alford remarks, "dialectical irony is for many critics another name for the Romantic irony" (1984, p. 22). Alford means by this a type of irony something very different from Booth's stable ironies. In the stable ironies, readers need to choose one way of reading, be it a non-ironical one or an ironical one, for the reading to progress. Dialectical irony, on the other hand, is contradictory, or, as Schlegel puts it, "irony is the form of paradox"[18] (SCHLEGEL,

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15 Schlegel's brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel, was also an influential member of the movement. Since I will focus here on Friedrich Schlegel, I will refer to him only as Schlegel.

16 Other Jena romantics, such as Novalis and Solger, also talked about irony in their writings. But since Schlegel is the one who is most readily associated with it, I work here with his theories.

17 The distinction between becoming and being was made by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, as an alternative to the static Forms of Ideas of Plato.

18 This edition of selected Schlegel's works, which includes *Lucinde* and the *Fragments*, was translated into English by Peter Firchow.

1971, p. 149). In this type of irony, both the literal and the reconstructed ironic readings are accepted. The final meaning is itself paradoxical, as it is a synthesis of both possibilities. This type of irony is also undecidable, another difference from stable ironies, since the reader cannot decide between thesis and antithesis, but instead vacillates between them in a dialectical way.

Colebrook explains how this contradiction was viewed by Jena Romantics: "Whereas in logical discourse a contradiction leads to nothingness, insofar as we dismiss contradictions, in poetic discourse contradictions are productive and ironic. They allow any voice to be doubled by the suggestion that what is said is both meant and not meant" (2005, p. 57). The paradox itself is productive perhaps not in a completely rational sense, but instead in an intuitive, imaginative sense. Through this paradox there is the possibility of having a glimpse of the transcendental truth, as for Jena Romantics this is a breach, through a microcosm, to the macrocosm. Muecke illuminates the question further:

> In Romantic Irony, art's inherent limitation, the incapacity of a work of art, as something created, to fully capture and represent the complex and dynamic creativity of life is, in its turn, imaginatively taken to the consciousness when thematic recognition is attributed to it. Through this, the work of art transcends the naive mimesis and acquires an open dimension that can invite us to later speculation.[19] (2008, p. 95)

Like Colebrook, Muecke recognizes the uselessness of what he calls a "naive mimesis," a simple depiction of the *being*, for this concept. The focus is not on the *being*, but instead on the *becoming*, which leads to speculation and evolution.

The philosophical posture of the Jena Romantics is discernible in Romantic irony. The acceptance of contradiction, which leads to a rejection of formal logic, and the use of dialectics is opposed to a static way of apprehending the world. A developmental way is instead its basis. This is in line with German idealist's opposition to the static and mechanistic rationalism of the Enlightenment from philosophers such as Locke and Leibniz. Also, the inaccessibility of the transcendental truth through reason, and instead through some kind of intuitiveness is perceivable as a basis for Romantic irony.

In the text "*Über die Unverständlichkeit*"[20] (1800) Schlegel tackles this inaccessibility by exploring the alleged difficulty of his works. To do so, he uses irony

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[19] "Na Ironia Romântica, a inerente limitação da arte, a incapacidade de uma obra de arte, como algo criado, de captar plenamente e representar a complexa e dinâmica criatividade da vida é, por sua vez, imaginativamente levada à consciência quando se lhe atribui reconhecimento temático. Deste modo, a obra transcende a mimese ingênua e adquire uma dimensão aberta que pode convidar-nos à posterior especulação" (Muecke's book was translated into Portuguese by Geraldo Gerson de Sousa).

[20] Translated into English as "On Incomprehensibility" by Peter Firchow (SCHLEGEL, 1971).

throughout the text, since irony is in a lot of aspects similar to the concept of incomprehensibility. As Bruno C. Duarte notices, "everything in the observation of irony and of its gradations, points to this affinity: the logical incompatibility of opposites, the suspension of judgment, the rupture with the closed circuit of semantic order, the neutralization of intention and authorial determinism, and so on"[21] (2011, p. 324). Irony is for Schlegel the very way in which the incomprehensibility most clearly appears.

Such inherent incomprehensibility of irony, because of its logical undecidability, questions inherited traditions. This was something that Romantics in general were eager to do. They were able, through their kind of irony, to question moral and ethical standards. This is something that appears prominently in Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* (1799), which advocated individual freedom through the demolition of the morality and ethics of the time. Another aspect of the undecidability of Romantic irony relevant is its opposition to reason, an obvious Romantic value, which Blake cultivated. Romantic irony's paradoxes bring to texts an unreasonableness that cannot be resolved through logic—at least not through deductive logic. This unreasonableness must instead be embraced by the imagination. When, in *Jerusalem*, Blake says that "Imagination the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow" (BLAKE, 1982, p. 231), he is putting the imagination above our fallen world ("Vegetable Universe") in a way which is similar to the Jena Romantics. Their exaltation of imagination contrasts with what was until then the accepted idea of logic and reason as what was above individual human beings, since we all share this capacity and agree on its conclusions—I mean mathematics and formal logic. Imagination, on the other hand, brings creativity and intuition to the front.

The kind of irony advocated by the Jena Romantics would soon be criticized. Hegel would call it "infinite absolute negativity,"[22] as Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard reports in his book on irony (apud KIERKEGAARD, 2018, p. 255). Kierkegaard explains why he found Hegel's definition so just: "The *sensu eminentiori* irony is not directed against this or that individual being, it is rather directed against all the reality of a given epoch and under certain conditions"[23] (2018, p. 255). By "*sensu eminentiori* irony" Kierkegaard is referring to

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[21] "Tudo na observação da ironia e das suas gradações, aponta para essa afinidade: a incompatibilidade lógica dos opostos, a suspensão do juízo, a ruptura com o circuito fechado da ordem semântica, a neutralização da intenção e do determinismo autorais, e assim por diante."

[22] "negatividade absoluta infinita" (Kierkegaard's book was translated into Portuguese by Luiz Montenegro Valls).

[23] "A ironia *sensu eminentiori* não se dirige contra este ou aquele existente individual, ela se dirige contra toda a realidade dada em uma certa época e sob certas condições."

Schlegel's concept of irony. Both the German and the Danish philosophers were mainly thinking about *Lucinde*, in which the irony is indeed so pervasive that nothing is left standing. Such a complete negativity destroys everything, both good and bad aspects, in a "reality of a given epoch and under certain conditions."

According to Constantino Luz de Medeiros, a specialist in Schlegel's works, Hegel's criticism of the Romantic irony seems to derive from his lack of acquaintance with Schlegel's whole *oeuvre*, along with Schlegel's hermetic terminology (2014, p. 62). Indeed, Schlegel's works were too fragmented to be thoroughly found and read, and his notebooks, containing key passages on his theory of irony, were only edited and published in the twentieth century. Perhaps as a consequence of this, Hegel's critique of this irony as "identified with the excess of subjectivity"[24] turned out to be usually followed in the nineteenth century, which is what happens in Kierkegaard's book on irony (MEDEIROS, 2014, p. 63). It was only in the twentieth century, with a broader revision of the Jena Romantics by thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault that Schlegel's irony would be reinterpreted (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2018, p. 9-10).

Hegel found that Schlegel's concept of irony was a perversion of the irony Socrates employed in his conversations (MEDEIROS, 2014, p. 62). So did Kierkegaard, who extensively explains Socratic irony in his book. He explains that, like Schlegel's, Socratic irony is dialogic. In the Socratic dialogues, written by Plato, Socrates is usually talking to someone considered wise by their peers, and he manages to undermine the certainties of whomever he's talking to—usually sophists—by ironically negating them. In this sense, Socrates is for Kierkegaard never positive, because he does not advocate a certainty or a theory of his own; instead, he is negative, destroying certainties which prove to be false, as a way to get closer to the truth.

Kierkegaard explains the validity of Socratic irony by recurring to the philosophical perspective of Socrates' times. Socratic irony was to the Danish philosopher a necessary weapon against the sophists' positivity, which was "as insipid on the theoretical aspect as it was harmful on the practical aspect"[25] (2018, p. 215). Socrates was a point of inflection, a paradigm shifter in the history of philosophy because of his ironic method, by which sophists would be defeated. This is why, according to Kierkegaard, Socrates could not be positive: "If Socrates had had a positivity to affirm, the consequence would be that he and the sophists

[24] "identificada ao excesso de subjetividade."

[25] "tão insípida no aspecto teórico quanto prejudicial no aspecto prático."

would end up talking the same language"[26] (2018, p. 216). It seems that for Kierkegaard Socrates did use irony, and irony only, with premeditation, since anything besides it would not have worked. This historical justification of the Socratic irony by Kierkegaard is at the same time, in a sense, a condemnation of Schlegel's irony. Schlegel was not a point of inflection (most nowadays would say so about Kant, who wrote some decades earlier), and hence Socratic irony was not necessarily needed. Also, philosophy in Schlegel's time was not as positive as in Socrates'.

What is mostly felt in Kierkegaard's condemnation of Romantic irony is its destruction of any ethical standard. The romantic ironist "is not satisfied in just naively enjoying, but wants at the same time to be conscious of the given ethicality; the paroxysm of his enjoyment is to smile at that ethicality under whose power the others, as is believed, sigh: the free game of ironic arbitrariness occurs in this[27] (KIERKEGAARD, 2018, p. 292). Such ironists, if we follow Kierkegaard's argument, are not pursuing the ironic method to be closer to the truth, like Socrates; instead, they use the irony as a form of self-satisfaction in their own supposed superiority. For Kierkegaard, such an attitude is not brave, intelligent, or even poetic, but a sign of frailty and cowardice (2018, p. 300).

The Danish philosopher is fierce in attacking the supposed poetic aspect of Romantic irony. At the time he was writing his thesis, which became his book on irony and was published in 1841, Hegel and others had already attacked the moral and ethical implications of Schlegel's concepts. Jena Romantics, however, were still positively called poetic, something that Kierkegaard was eager to correct: "With this he tries *to live poetically*; I believe, however, that it will be shown that he is deprived exactly of the poetic, because it only results through resignation to the true inner infinitude, and only this inner infinitude is in truth infinite and poetic"[28] (KIERKEGAARD, 2018, p. 294). For this study, Kierkegaard's concept of irony, briefly explained in the end of his book, which fuses Socratic irony with Christian thought, is not relevant. What is relevant here is Kierkegaard's view that Schlegel's

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[26] "Se Sócrates tivesse sido uma positividade por afirmar, a consequência daí seria que ele e os sofistas acabariam falando na mesma língua."

[27] "não se contenta em apenas gozar ingenuamente, mas ao mesmo tempo quer permanecer consciente da eticidade dada; é como que o paroxismo do seu gozo sorrir daquela eticidade sob jugo da qual os outros, como se crê, suspiram, e aí está o livre jogo da arbitrariedade irônica."

[28] "Com isto ele intenta então *viver poeticamente*; eu creio, porém, que se mostrará que ele fica privado justamente do poético, pois só através da resignação resulta a verdadeira infinitude interior, e somente esta infinitude interior é em verdade infinita e em verdade poética" (Kierkegaard's italics).

"*plunging into aesthetic narcosis*"[29] is not "*to live poetically*;" Schlegel's concept is not only immoral and unethical, but also "*irreligious*"[30] (KIERKEGAARD, 2018, p. 300-301).

As it was said before, *Lucinde* was the main target of Kierkegaard's attack. According to Muecke, *Lucinde* is an imperfect example of Romantic irony (2008, p. 126). Schlegel's irony can be more fully understood by reading his other writings, such as his *Fragments*. In these fragments, Medeiros sees differences from what Kierkegaard critiques. In them, a theory of how Romantic irony works is developed—even though, since it was written in fragments, this theory needs to be recomposed by the reader. Medeiros notes that Schlegel called attention to terms such as "parabasis" and "buffoon,"[31] which are connected to the literary tradition (2014, p. 56). By understanding how these terms relate to Schlegel's irony it is possible to understand his concept.

Parabasis is a term used to define a section in the Greek comedies in which the chorus talks directly to the audience (MEDEIROS, 2014, p. 58). This section was connected to the point of view of the author, in which he reflected upon the events of the play being enacted (CUDDON, 2013, p. 509). The parabasis is, then, a creative counterpoint of the author on his/her creation, a metacommentary as a way to critically engage with the play while it is happening. Another term Schlegel used, the "buffoon," was a character in medieval plays called *commedia dell'arte* (MEDEIROS, 2014, p. 56). The buffoon's function was to prepare the scene for the entrance of other characters and make transitions in the plot of the plays, improvising jokes and commenting on what had happened until then. Medeiros also connects the buffoon with "the role of the dramatist"[32] because of his self-critical stance. Both parabasis and buffoon come from drama, more specifically from comedies, and both have to do with a critical stance towards the play being enacted. They are, in this sense, authorial interventions in the middle of the text, a creative and critical act at the same time. For Schlegel, a "permanent parabasis" was needed, meaning that a constant critical reflection on the act of creation was necessary (SCHLEGEL, 1971, p. 29).

This "permanent parabasis" seems closer to what Schlegel meant by irony. There is always in it an attitude of approximation and withdrawal, the act of creation *per se* and the critical reflection upon it. This coming and going is likened by Medeiros to a pendulum, a

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29 "*mergulhar na narcose estética*" (Kierkegaard's italics).

30 "*irreligioso*" (Kierkegaard's italics).

31 Medeiros originally terms them "parábase" and "bufão" respectively.

32 "o papel do dramaturgo."

dialectical process which by its movement "would leave traces from the infinite in the finite"[33] (2014, p. 58). Rüdiger Safranski further explains:

> If until now [before *Frühromantik*] it was said: 'form, artist, do not talk,' now it is exactly the contrary that works: the artist must poetize and think and talk about everything. He must present something and reflect about what he presented […] Poetry that thinks itself becomes ironic because it breaks with the appearance of the whole complete in itself.[34] (2010, p. 63-64)

Safranski's link of "permanent parabasis" and irony is enlightening, and points to the aforementioned discussion of incomprehensibility in its doubting of the whole.

For this process to work, Medeiros identifies in Schlegel's fragments three steps for the act of creation: "'self-creation,' 'self-annihilation,' and 'self-restriction'"[35] (2014, p. 58). The "self-creation" is the step in which the author is completely committed to his/her intuition: the author is "naive, enthusiastic, inspired, imaginative"[36] (MUECKE, 2008, p. 41). This step carries with it the problem of the closeness of the subject to the author. The work of art shackles the author's liberty[37] in this step, because of the closeness which makes the author see too narrowly. The "self-annihilation," on the other hand, is the critical stance, through which the author is able to criticize and correct his/her own work of art. These steps complement each other, and both are necessary for the work of art to succeed.

Schlegel's famous 37th fragment makes these concepts of "self-creation" and "self-annihilation" clearer:

> In order to write well about something, one shouldn't be interested in it any longer. To express an idea with due circumspection, one must have relegated it wholly to one's past; one must no longer be preoccupied with it. As long as the artist is in the process of discovery and inspiration, he is in a state which, as far as communication is concerned, is at the very least intolerant. He wants to blurt out everything, which is a fault of young geniuses or a legitimate prejudice of old bunglers. And so he fails to recognize the value and the dignity of self-restriction, which is after all, for the artist as well as the man, the first and the last, the most necessary and the highest duty. (SCHLEGEL, 1971, p. 146-147)

In the first sentence Schlegel signals to the importance of "self-annihilation." The next sentences warn about the dangers of relying too heavily on "self-creation," noting the

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33 "deixaria marcas do infinito no finito."

34 "Se até agora se dizia: 'forme, artista, não fale', agora deve valer exatamente o contrário: o artista deve poetizar e pensar e falar sobre tudo. Ele deve apresentar algo e refletir sobre o que apresentou […] Poesia que se pensa torna-se irônica porque rompe com a aparência do todo completo em si" (Safranski's book was translated into Portuguese by Rita Rios).

35 "'autocriação' [*Selbstschöpfung*], 'autoaniquilamento' [*Selbstvernichtung*] e 'autolimitação' [*Selbstbeschränkung*]."

36 "ingênuo, entusiasta, inspirado, imaginativo."

37 Liberty is an important concept for Schlegel, derived from Fichte, in whose philosophy liberty plays a major role.

"illiberal state" caused by this. This "illiberal state" is exactly what his last concept, "self-restriction," comes to change. "Self-restriction" is a synthesis of both earlier steps, and represents a salutary distancing between the subject and the artist, which leads to a liberal state.

Both self-creation and self-annihilation are related, respectively, to the concepts of naive and sentimental poets, created by German classicist Friedrich Schiller. In his famous essay "*Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*"[38] (1795), Schiller makes the distinction between what he perceives to be two different kinds of poets. Orhan Pamuk succinctly explains Schiller's concepts: the naive poets are "unaware of the techniques they are using: they write spontaneously, as if they were carrying out a perfectly natural act, oblivious to the operations and calculations they are performing in their head"[39] (PAMUK, 2011, p. 13); sentimental poets, on the other hand, "are fascinated by the artificiality of the text and its failure to attain reality, and […] pay close attention to the methods used in writing" (PAMUK, 2011, p. 13). Even with the similarity between Schiller's concepts and both self-creation and self-annihilation, it needs to be emphasized that Schiller's two concepts work as a dichotomy, and not as a dialectical process. Hence, there is no equivalent to self-restriction in Schiller.

The reader needs to understand that Schlegel's three concepts just explained, as well as his "permanent parabasis," should not be used as tools for a close reading, something that has been done. Germanist Raymond Immerwahr is against this view:

> Once one pays heed to Schlegel's own explanation of the phrase "Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung" [self-creation and self-annihilation], it becomes apparent that he is not referring to the outright destruction of objective illusion. His grossly extravagant, deliberately sensational metaphors and cultivated oracular incoherence have given rise to misunderstandings such as this and obscured the actual intent of his words. (1951, p. 179)

The "outright destruction of objective illusion" that Immerwahr is referring to supposedly does not occur, for instance, in Shakespeare's plays or in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, examples that Schlegel uses when talking about irony. However, at least in the case of Shakespeare, I tend to see with suspicion the claim of Immerwahr and others, who do not perceive any "destruction of objective illusion" in his plays. Shakespeare is well known for his meta-theatricality, and critics even have likened some characters of his comedies with the buffoon of *commedia dell'arte* (FRYE, 1953, p. 275).

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[38] Usually translated into English as "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry."

[39] Pamuk's book was translated into English by Nazim Dikbas.

Nevertheless, in "*Über Goethes Meister*"[40] (1798), a review of Goethe's novel, Schlegel is closer to what Immerwahr is referring to:

> We should not let ourselves be tricked by the fact that the poet himself treats his characters and events so lightly and humorously, that he almost never mentions the hero without irony, and that from the height of his spirit he seems to disdainfully smile at his masterpiece, as if it was not for him of the most sacred seriousness.[41] (SCHLEGEL, 2006, p. 132)

The style here is indeed "extravagant." Schlegel touches on his concept of irony tangentially, but the conjunction of humor with seriousness that Schlegel is implying in Goethe's novel can be related to irony.

I suppose that if this quotation would enter an academic text like the present, not as quotation but as part of the main text, it would be classified, correctly, as too vague. Of course, Schlegel was not attempting to write an academic text like I am, bounded by the necessity of precision. His vagueness seems to be exactly the point, because what he is describing is not happening on the micro-level of a passage in *Meister,* which could be objectively analyzed in a close reading; it happens, instead, on the macro-level of the novel, as a consequence of the process of creation—and I am here not referring to Goethe's actual process of creation, but to Schlegel's self-creation, self-annihilation, and self-restriction. I share this opinion with Joseph A. Dane, who explains that "irony [in this essay] is not a local matter but a characteristic of the entire work" (2011, p. 105).

Dane traces the changes in the concepts of irony through the centuries in his revealing post-structuralist book, *The Critical Mythology of Irony* (1991). For this study what he has to say about Romantic irony is of special interest. Dane argues that the concept has been much debated, from which two types of argument can be identified. One of the arguments is in favor of Schlegel's irony, and points to its objectiveness—which is the case of Medeiros. This argument is mainly embraced by what Dane terms "romanticists"[42] (2011, p.

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40 Usually translated into English as "On Goethe's *Meister*."

41 "Não nos deixamos enganar portanto pelo fato de que o próprio poeta trata as personagens e eventos tão leve e humorosamente, de que quase nunca menciona o herói sem ironia e de que do alto do seu espírito parece mesmo sorrir com desdém para sua obra-prima, como se ela não fosse para ele da mais sagrada seriedade." I am quoting from the full text of Schlegel's "*Über Goethers Meister*," which Natália Giosa Fujita fully translates in her master's thesis as "Sobre o Meister de Goethe." Since Márcio Suzuki was her adviser, I would also like to add that his book *O Gênio Romântico* (1998) would probably be useful for understanding several aspects of this chapter. Unfortunately, I did not have access to it, despite best efforts.

42 Dane seems to me to use the word romanticist with not enough attention to who it encompasses. Ironically, this kind of attention is exactly what he gives to the word irony. This is expected in a book on irony, of course, but such a loaded word as romanticist (perhaps as complex as irony) seems to me to deserve at least some explanation. It would suffice to know if romanticists are simply scholars who work with Romanticism or followers/enthusiasts of Romantic precepts.

73). The other argument, on the other hand, condemns Schlegel's irony by pointing to its "subjectiveness," and is usually based on Hegel's critique of Schlegel—Kierkegaard is an apt example.

What these arguments show is the importance given to the dichotomy subjective/objective, and how all parties accept the objective as the superior and more desirable. According to Dane, a hierarchy (such as in objective over subjective) is an important part of the concept of irony throughout the ages (2011, p. 81). Another hierarchy occurring in Romantic irony is "a hierarchy of persons, with those persons defined as the romantic poet and a too often recalcitrant audience" (2011, p. 81). Dane points here to a phenomenon happening on the macro-level, supporting Immerwahr's earlier quotation. This is not far from a commentary of another Jena Romantic, Novalis: "What Schlegel so sharply characterized as irony is, in my opinion, nothing other than the product, the character of genuine discretion, the true presence of the spirit" (apud DANE, 2011, p. 78-79).

After going through the changes in the concept of Romantic irony since it was developed, Dane proposes an insightful argument: Romantic irony is

> one of many literary myths, with its own scripture and its own evolving dogma. […] Romantic irony cannot be reduced legitimately to a definition, nor can the claims made for it be taken at face value. Romantic irony, like irony itself, exists within the history that both produces and describes it; and only by ignoring that history can romanticists speak intelligibly of its practice or indeed of its historical origins. (2011, p. 118)

I believe anyone attempting to do what I will do in the following chapters, i.e. finding correspondences between Romantic irony and a given text, must answer this argument proposed by Dane.

Dane puts Schlegel neither as the father nor the ultimate authority on Romantic irony. In this, he is different from what he claims romanticists do. His argument is correct: Schlegel's concept of irony is indeed a construction developed through decades of research. It seems that for Dane Schlegel is not an author, but an "initiator of discursive practices," as in Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" (1975). According to Foucault, "the distinctive contribution of [initiators of discursive practices] is that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts" (2007, p. 1632). The French thinker only cites as examples Marx and Freud. I believe, however, that the definition fits Schlegel, not in the pervasive sense that it does Marx and Freud, but in the stricter and more limited sense of his contribution to the concept of Romantic irony. Schlegel is specially fit for the kind of argument made by Dane because of the scarcity and obscurity of his

writings, and even, for a long time, their availability. Moreover, as Dane's chapter on Romantic irony points to, Schlegel's fragments are sometimes unintelligible, and even contradictory. This gives rise, for instance, to the aforementioned debate on the "subjectiveness" or objectiveness of his irony.

As for Dane's last sentence ("and only by ignoring that history can romanticists speak intelligibly of its practice or indeed of its historical origins"), I believe this is not necessarily so, and even almost impossible for someone acquainted with his argument. In my case, by recurring to different scholars to develop the concept, as I have done, I am bound to a construct which is certainly not only Schlegel's, but it is both Schlegel's *and* a sum of authors and arguments that dealt with his texts. My conceptual construct, which I am referring to as either Romantic irony or Schlegel's concept of irony, even though not arbitrary, is arranged in a way that is unique to me, and I hope is not naively presented as Schlegel's own. With that said, I will continue to call it either Romantic irony or Schlegel's irony, putting him not as the author(ity), but as an initiator of a discursive practice.

Even though Schlegel speaks from a Romantic perspective, his irony does not describe so much the irony of works of his fellow Jena Romantics—he talks mainly about irony in relation to Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Goethe. In fact, one of the debates surrounding the objectiveness/subjectiveness of his concept has to do with the admittance (or not) of the works of Jena Romantic Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) as instances of Romantic irony. Tieck's works utilize what some scholars linked with Schlegel's "permanent parabasis," or, in Immerwahr's words, the "destruction of objective illusion." As I emphasized earlier, this is not the line of thought I am pursuing.

With this said, there was a gap in the criticism of Romanticism, because the irony studied was not necessarily the irony which was employed by Romantic writers. This gap was studied by scholars such as Maria de Lourdes Ferraz. Her argument is convincing:

> Instead of looking for what in the romanticism of each country would bring the seal of irony, an extended concept was divulged of what in German romanticism was understood as such […] and, paradoxically, it was by the presence or absence of certain traits (considered as the unequivocal manifestation of Romantic irony) that the genuineness of the phenomenon was judged.[43] (1987, p. 40)

After going through Dane's arguments, the "certain traits" become even more problematic. Still, the necessity of understanding the irony used in the Romanticism of each country is

[43] "Em vez de se procurar o que no romantismo de cada país traria o selo da ironia, divulgou-se um alargado conceito do que no romantismo alemão se entendeu por tal […] e, paradoxalmente, foi pela presença ou ausência de certos traços (considerados como manifestação inequívoca da ironia romântica) que se julgou da genuinidade do fenómeno."

even more crucial. Ferraz, in her book, analyzes how irony functions in works of Portuguese Romanticism. Critics from other countries have also studied the ironies in the Romanticism of specific countries.

For my purpose, the research developed by David Simpson in this line, analyzing the irony of British Romantic poetry, will be of special interest. In his book *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* (1979), Simpson focuses on key poets of the Romantic period in Great Britain (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats) in order to understand the characteristics of the irony employed by them. He presents some characteristics shared by these poets, and ends up constructing a "Romantic irony" based on them. As I mentioned in the introduction, since he deals with British Romantic poets, I will call his a British Romantic irony (he calls it simply Romantic irony), so as to set it apart from Schlegel's. It should be noticed, however, that Simpson only deals with a small set of writers in order to construct his concept; more importantly, all writers considered are men writing poetry, something that narrows considerably his scope, since prose writers such as Jane Austen are not analyzed. Still, for my purposes, Simpson's concept will prove useful.

One of the first claims Simpson makes about British Romantic irony is the connection it has with childhood. To do so, he uses the philosophy of John Locke, for whom children are born only with the capacity of learning. This view, which is contrary to Plato's, was influential in the eighteenth century, and seems to have been received positively by Romantic poets. According to Simpson, Locke was "far closer to the 'Romantic' mind than we might expect from his reputation" (1979, p. 33). The reputation was of a champion of rationalism, which was combated by Romantics.

The consciousness of adults is contrasted with that of children by Simpson:

> This positioning of the child in terms of the adult consciousness makes him an "ironist," a persona whose exact status in himself is indeterminable, and therefore unassailable, and whose function consists in this negativity, this emptiness, the disruption of institutions and personalities outside himself through being perceived by them as their "other." (1979, p. 33)

At first it seems odd to put a child as "ironist," given the fact that irony is supposed to be one of the last tropes children learn, after analogy and metaphor (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 92). The point, however, is not that the child is intentionally ironic: rather, irony is the method through which children perceive themselves and the outside world.

With the claim about the approximation of John Locke and Romantics, however, Simpson seems to ignore one specificity of Blake. Blake is much closer to neoplatonists in his

theory of ideas than he is to Locke. An example of this is his blunt criticism of Joshua Reynolds's works. In the marginalia to Reynolds's texts, Blake claims that "Innate Ideas are in Every Man, born with him […] The man who says that we have no Innate Ideas must be a fool & knave" (BLAKE, 1988, p. 648). Reynolds was much influenced by John Locke, along with Edmund Burke, figures whom Blake did not appreciate, and here he is attacking Locke's philosophy directly. Apart from this, Simpson's argument seems to me still valid, since the method through which children can have access to these "Innate Ideas" can arguably be considered an ironic one. Furthermore, Simpson himself links the idea of memory in Blake with tradition and authority (1979, p. 126). These points are exactly what children are able to challenge, and the lack of a constituted memory is sufficient to fit them in the aforementioned quotation.

This kind of challenge is also perceived by Schiller: "The child's act […] puts the world to shame, and this our hearts also confess by the satisfaction they derive from such an art" (apud SIMPSON, 1979, p. 33). What children do, then, is a sort of demystification, a naive deconstruction if that is at all possible. In a fragment, Schlegel brings a correlated idea: "*Children*. They imitate adults, but also they do not. They are humans, but also they are not. Seriousness in play and playing with what is serious"[44] (SCHLEGEL, 2016, p. 329). The idea of merging seriousness and play is in itself an ironic way of acting.

A relevant point, however, is that children are not aware of their demystification as such. According to Simpson, the child "is denied the level of metacommentary, the stable identity which would enable him to replace in any absolute way the authority which he challenges" (1979, p. 33). Adults almost always add some kind of metacommentary to their critiques. Children, on the other hand, are not able to do so, and this is what makes them "romantic ironists" (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 33). A link with Kierkegaard's critique of Schlegel's irony can be made here. In the sense just developed, Schlegel's *Lucinde* would not be considered an instance of Romantic irony because, in Kierkegaard's words, he "wants […] to be conscious of the given ethicality" (KIERKEGAARD, 2018, p. 292). This means that Schlegel is himself making a comment, even if nihilistically, and putting himself in the role of the authority.

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[44] "*Crianças*. Elas imitam os adultos, mas também não imitam. São humanos, mas também não são. Seriedade na brincadeira e brincadeira com o que é sério" (translated by Constantino Luz de Medeiros e Márcio Suzuki).

If for Simpson the role of childhood is of great importance in the definition of his British Romantic irony, citing examples specially from Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, the role of tonality in the poems is also emphasized. Tone is a trait inherent in speech, but not in written texts. Not only gestures, such as raising the eyebrows, can be used to hint at ironic meanings in spoken language. The tone of voice can be employed for this effect, by applying a derogatory, excessive, and a number of other qualities to the utterance that suggests for the hearers a meaning which is not exactly the same as what is being said literally. This is not a possibility in written texts; since poems are potentially spoken texts, however, the reader has the possibility of applying different tones of voice to the reading, creating additional or even conflicting meanings.

According to Simpson, this is linked with the metaphor of the fall used to explain the act of writing (1969, p. 65). The fall occurs by restricting the tone to a normative, standard one. There is the possibility, however, of seeing this fall as a *felix culpa* (not unlike, the reader will notice, the idea permeating Jena Romanticism), which in itself contains not a standardized, authoritative tone, but instead a possibly infinite number of potential utterances with different tones of voice, which brings an impossibility of closure of the text. Such impossibility is in tandem with the Romantic rebellion against established authority.

The reader by now might be skeptical about Simpson's argument, since not only Romantic poems, but any kind of poem can be read with different tones of voice that will produce different meanings. In order to support his argument, Simpson uses a quotation from Hegel's *The Phenomenology of the Mind* (1807): "Language and labour are outer expressions in which the individual no longer retains possession of himself *per se*, but lets the inner get right outside him, and surrenders it to something else" (apud SIMPSON, 1979, p. 65). While this passage supports Simpson's arguments, at the same time it brings the discussion to the artist. We know from Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* that the paradigm of criticism changed in the Romantic period from the earlier focus on what is represented (Aristotle's mimesis) or on the audience (classic rhetoric) to a focus on the artist (ABRAMS, 1971). Hegel here seems representative of this shift, while at the same time questioning the capacity of the reader to grasp the artist's intention. This is similar to Schlegel's "impossibility and the necessity of complete communication" (SCHLEGEL, 1971, p. 156).

The idea, then, is that in British Romantic poetry the gap between the artist's intention and the meaning attributed by the reader was well perceived by the poets. By

combining this with their defiance of established authority, the poems they created not only allow readings with different tones of voices for different effects, but also invite the reader to do so. These poets added an "atmosphere of ambivalence and potential discomfort, involving as it does the intrusion of indeterminate 'tones of voice' which upset the apparent precision of the written word" (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 86). For a twenty-first-century learned readership—i.e. after Nietzsche, Freud, and the post-structuralists, among others—the impossibility of total communication is a given, of course; such impossibility started to become commonsensical with the Romantics themselves. The point is that from an eighteenth-century or earlier perspective this was not commonsensical, but innovative; not something which is everywhere and goes almost unnoticed, but different enough to get attention, to defamiliarize, and hence able to generate irony.

The last point on Simpson's book I want to emphasize, after the connection with childhood and the importance of tone, is the occurrence of syntactic tensions, which are deployed in poems written by British Romantic poets. He explains that "Deployed tensions between subject and object, touching upon their possible identification, has often been noticed as an important feature of the Romantic lyric" (1979, p. 88). Such tensions create ambiguity in the poems, and make them undecidable. The defiance of authority is again evident; however, the connection made between subject and object, writer and reader, is still more relevant.

In order to illustrate his point, Simpson mainly uses examples from Blake and Shelley. Probably not unrelated to this is both Blake's and Shelley's more intense political radicalism compared with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. I cite one example from Blake's *The Book of Urizen*, on which Simpson comments:

> The bellows & hammer are silent now
> A nerveless silence, his prophetic voice
> Siez'd; a cold solitude & dark void
> The Eternal Prophet & Urizen clos'd (BLAKE, 1988, p. 76)

According to Simpson, "'the nerveless silence' appears both as the object of 'siez'd,' and as an amplification of the preceding line, in which case the verb describes the seizing-up of the voice, in a reflexive sense" (1979, p. 89). This is potentiated by Blake's misleading use of punctuation, which is more akin to pauses in declamation than with merely grammatical use of punctuation. Both syntactic meanings pointed out by Simpson are possible, approximating this to a dialectical irony. The verb "clos'd" also brings another instance of this irony, since

we cannot know if "The Eternal Prophet & Urizen" closed the dark void, or "are being enclosed by it" (1979, p. 89).[45]

Simpson also explains that, if syntax is "conventionally the embodiment of normative hierarchies and stable progressions based on explicit subject / predicate relationships, [it] becomes, for Blake and Shelley particularly, a mode of displacement and confusion" (1979, p. 90). These poets use syntactic tensions to disrupt established ways of writing and reading, making the reader "aware that all meaning is partial" (1979, p. 90). This partiality of meaning reiterates that total communication is an impossibility.

With these three points of Simpson's book already explained, his preoccupation with the notion of authority is easily noticeable. The book was written some years after the May 1968 events in France, with all the theoretical implications they had; this influence is felt in the book. Simpson's arguments are relevant because Romantics were also defiant of established authority. I tend to believe, however, that an important aspect is different between both contexts: the Romantic movement brought the focus of the critical debate to the author, while thinkers associated with the May 1968 events were, on the contrary, trying to diminish the importance of the author. The authority for the Romantics, then, does not include the authority of the author—"which yet commands an indubitable authority" (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 187). The authority, in the case of the Romantics, is restricted to an "authoritarian selfhood," and also what we commonly associate with the word: in the case of the British Romantics, the Anglican church, conservative governments, even (at least for Blake) the Royal Academy of Arts (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 187).

Similarly to Schlegel, Simpson puts Shakespeare as "the most successful romantic ironist" (1979, p. 185). Shakespeare was able to be all his characters while at the same time being none. This is enhanced by our poor knowledge of biographical facts about Shakespeare, a characteristic he shares with other "romantic ironists" Simpson cites, Socrates and Jesus. If these persons do not share the three traits I linked to British Romantic irony, their connections with the Romantic poets in Simpson's study lies perhaps mostly on the "elision of authoritarian selfhood" (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 187).

Despite putting Shakespeare as an exemplar writer (something that Romantics usually did), British Romantic irony differs in some aspects from Schlegel's irony. Simpson usually works on the micro-level, and the characteristics I explained earlier can be used in the

[45] New Critics also linked this syntactic instability to irony. In "Irony as a Principle of Structure," Cleanth Brooks finds an example of this in Wordsworth's "A slumber did my spirit seal" (2007, p. 803).

strict context of a close reading. Schlegel's irony, on the other hand, works on the macro-level of the whole work, and is more difficult to apply it to specific passages. Schlegel's irony, in accordance with other Romantic theories, focuses its attention on the writer, whereas British Romantic irony is more interested on the text itself, and how it provokes the kind of irony being explained. The dialectical irony occurs on both types, but Schlegel's seems broader, while in Simpson it is more well developed in the three traits.

With these different concepts of irony in mind, I will analyze in the following chapters the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The analyses will focus less on the finding in the texts specific types of irony such as verbal irony or situational irony, but instead they will use these ironies to make a link with Schlegel's concept of irony and with British Romantic irony. Each analysis (both in chapter 3 and 4) is structured on a three-step process, where a thesis is presented in the first step, the antithesis in the second, and an attempt of synthesis is made in the third. The process works in a dialectical way, akin to the dialectical aspect of Romantic irony.

3 EXPERIENCED READINGS OF INNOCENCE

For this chapter, I analyze poems from the "Innocence" part of *Songs*. Each analysis consists of three moments. In the first moment I make what I am calling an Innocent reading. In this reading, aspects of Innocence are considered unironically: on the contrary, Innocence's optimism and good humor, are taken at face value. An Innocent reading, since it is a reading as made by someone in the state of Innocence, can appear sometimes to be too naive. This is where the Experienced reading enters. The Experienced reading questions all the elements of the Innocent reading that were taken at face value. Being in the state of Experience, what can appear as minor aspects in an Innocent reading are crucial elements for the Experienced reading to ironically question all the assumptions of Innocence.[46] The third and last moment of my analysis is where a synthesis occurs. This synthesis is an attempt to transcend Innocence and Experience to achieve what I referred to in the Introduction as a higher Innocence, or the "state of Eden" (BLOOM, 1971, p. 20). Such synthesis is a dialectical interplay between the Innocent and Experienced readings, where both readings are ironically contrasted for them to be transcended.

As I stated in the introduction, I do not read Blake as making a case for one of the states in favor of the other. What I am interested in is showing how the prevalence of either state can be harmful. This needs to be emphasized, because readers at first can find it easier to try and attribute a higher status to one of the states. From an inattentive reading the state of Innocence seems the more pleasurable, hence the best state. However, just to show how Innocence can be negative in Blake's works, in a book he engraved ca. 1790, *The Book of Thel*, the main character, Thel, begins the narrative in a state of Innocence. As the plot progresses, she is unable to make a leap to the state of Experience. Therefore, "Thel represents the failure of Innocence," is troubled and sad for the rest of her life, since her cowardice refrained her from progressing in her life (BLOOM, 1963, p. 53).

Even though the desired point of arrival is the state of Eden, it needs to be noticed that the attainment of such a state is not simple. If only after the fall from Innocence to Experience one is able to reach the state of Eden, it does not follow that after the fall one necessarily will get there. The fall is a necessary cause, but is not a sufficient one, since

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[46] In fact, for my analysis of "The Little Black Boy" I start with an Experienced reading and then proceed to an Innocent reading. The aspects of Experience in this poem seem to me so prominent that such a procedure seemed justifiable.

Experience itself can be so overbearing as to prohibit any transcendence. Other events are necessary, then, to achieve the state of Eden. I believe that one possibility is to try and achieve a positive dialectical interplay between Innocence and Experience. This is what I will pursue in the third moment of each of my analyses.

In this chapter, I analyze six poems from "Innocence." None of them have a mirror poem in "Experience." I chose poems that were representative of "Innocence:" "The Shepherd" brings the pastoral; "A Cradle Song" depicts the mother's attention to the child; "Laughing Song" is a mirthful poem of celebration; "The Blossom" is one of the poems revolving around flowers of the *Songs*; "The Ecchoing Green" and "The Little Black Boy" are poems with children as speakers.

3.1 ATTENDING LAMBS AND CHILDREN

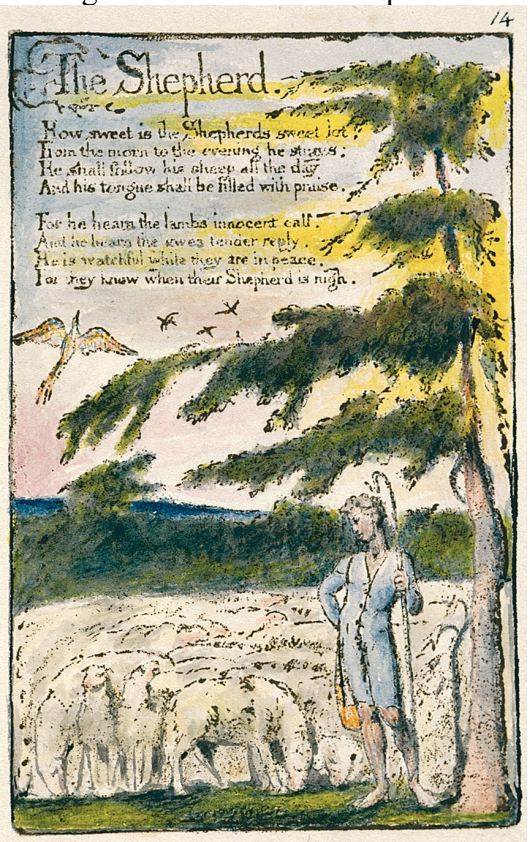
Table 1 – "The Shepherd"

How sweet is the shepherds sweet lot,
From the morn the evening he strays:
He shall follow his sheep all the day
And his tongue shall be filled with praise.

For he hears the lambs innocent call.
And he hears the ewes tender reply.
He is watchful while they are in peace.
For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.

(BLAKE, 1988, p. 7)

Figure 3: L 14 - "The Shepherd"



Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

"The Shepherd" depicts a shepherd taking care of his sheep. It uses the tradition of pastoral, more specifically Christian pastoral, as its backbone. Psalm 23 is an apt precedent for this poem (BLOOM, 1971, p. 35), depicting God as the shepherd. Whereas the psalm attributed to David develops a traditional metaphor, beginning with "the Lord is my shepherd"[47] (BIBLE, Psalms, 23, 1), in Blake's poem there is a tension between the literal and the metaphorical aspect of the characterization.

In the two stanzas of the poem, the speaker, seemingly joyful, celebrates the life of the Shepherd. The Shepherd "follow[s] his sheep all the day," hearing and watching them. The speaker mentions the youthful "ewe" and "lamb," and uses adjectives which denote peacefulness and warmth ("sweet," "innocent," and "tender"). The designs accompanying the text also develop this tone: we see an attentive shepherd carrying a staff near a verdant-leaved tree in the forefront. Immediately behind him a large flock of sheep grazes quietly. Birds are flying, and it seems that the sun is rising.

We can easily perceive that the speaker, with such happiness in his utterance, is in a state of Innocence. Simpson plausibly equates this speaker with the one from "Introduction," mentioning that "The Shepherd" is immediately preceded by "Introduction" in most of the copies Blake produced (1979, p. 86).[48] In order to uncover aspects of Experience from this poem, a reading that questions all this Innocence is necessary.

Simpson questions this at first simply by reading the first verse in a different tone: "How sweet *is* the Shepherds sweet lot" (1979, p. 87). The first verse, instead of a rhetorical question, becomes an actual question, answered in the following two verses: "From the morn to the evening he strays: / He shall follow his sheep all the day." The sweetness of such passive activities can easily be questioned and mocked by the reader who have Experience in mind: the Shepherd simply walks all the day following a flock of sheep. And for all of this coming and going "his tongue shall be filled with praise." He now may seem to us like a sort of dumb fellow to be thankful for what is possibly an exhausting and dull activity. Through this perspective the design of the shepherd accompanying the text can be interpreted as someone who's tired, unable to support himself, and reliant on his staff—after all, he is walking non-stop. His countenance becomes maybe still zealous, but also gloomy.

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47 I am using in this thesis the King James Version of the Bible (1611), since it probably was the translation Blake had access to.

48 I analyze the "Introduction" poems in the next chapter.

By now, the first verse of the poem seems like a bitter irony, since there is no “sweet lot” for the Shepherd. Recurring again to British Romantic irony’s varying tonality, the first two verses of the second stanza can be read as irony: “For he hears the *lambs innocent call*, / And he hears the *ewes tender reply*.” The lamb’s and ewe’s actual Innocence bitterly contrast with the Shepherd’s “*sweet lot*.” If in an Innocence reading the lamb and the ewe brings to the mind positive, nurturing feelings, here their infancy—signaling a recent procreation—contrasts with the Shepherd’s loneliness.

The last two verses now become frightful: “He is watchful while they are in peace, / For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.” If in the Innocent reading the Shepherd is watchful for bad things that can happen to the sheep, another possibility appears in an Experienced reading: the Shepherd is watchful so that the sheep will not disturb the peace, and at least will not disturb the dull sadness of his position; and, since “their Shepherd is nigh,” they do not dare to do such thing. The Shepherd becomes an authoritarian figure: his countenance is certainly attentive and gloomy, but also rigorous, frowning.

I believe that through this Experienced reading it is easier to analyze the metaphorical aspect of the poem, which is linked to the aforementioned Psalm 23. As in the psalm, the Shepherd—notice the capitalization throughout the poem—can be related to God. In this Experienced reading not a loving one, but a rigorous and authoritarian figure. He can be related to Blake’s reading of the Jehovah of the Old Testament, “who dwells in flaming fire” (BLAKE, 1988, p. 35). Whereas the sexual jealousy hinted at earlier can be dismissed in this metaphorical aspect, other points of the poem can be highlighted: the “praise” from the fourth verse is not only self-congratulatory, but also incites the sheep/persons to worship and fear this “jealous God” (BIBLE, Deuteronomy, 4, 24). This same metaphorical way of approaching the poem can also be applied in an Innocent reading, albeit with less interesting results.

Table 2 – “A Cradle Song”

Sweet dreams form a shade, O’er my lovely infants head. Sweet dreams of pleasant streams, By happy silent moony beams. Sweet sleep with soft down, Weave thy brows an infant crown. Sweet sleep Angel mild, Hover o’er my happy child. Sweet smiles in the night Hover over my delight. Sweet smiles Mothers smiles All the livelong beguiles. Sweet moans, dovelike sighs, Chase not slumber from thy eyes. Sweet moans, sweeter smiles, All the dovelike moans beguiles. Sleep sleep happy child. All creation slept and smil’d. Sleep sleep, happy sleep, While o’er thee thy mother weep. Sweet babe in thy face Holy image I can trace. Sweet babe once like thee, Thy maker lay and wept for me Wept for me for thee for all, When he was an infant small. Thou his image ever see, Heavenly face that smiles on thee. Smiles on thee on me on all, Who became an infant small, Infant smiles are his own smiles. Heaven & earth to peace beguiles. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 11-12)	Figure 4: L 16 - “A Cradle Song” (first plate)  Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

If “The Shepherd” shows the attention of the shepherd to his sheep, “A Cradle Song,” brings a mother, who is the speaker, attending her sleeping child, and deriving from the contemplation of feelings and thoughts. Blake wrote another poem with the same title, which have a more obvious Experienced tone, but left it in his notebook (GILLHAM, 2009, p.

182).[49] While the comparison of both poems can be fruitful,[50] I will focus here on the poem that ended up in the *Songs*. Even if does not create a tension as great as what we can perceive in other mirror poems, the analysis of this poem on its own also brings aspects of Experience that can be explored.

What is noticeable from the beginning is the mother's attention to her child: how she seems to perceive the "sweet moans, dovelike sighs" with care and curiosity. She sees what occurs with him as something that passes over him, like the dreams that "form a shade," or the "sweet sleep Angel mild / Hover o'er my happy child." She is not concerned here with her baby's identity, but instead is attentive to his sleep, dreams, smiles, and moans.

It is not until the fifth stanza that perhaps some hint of more intense preoccupation is uttered by the mother, who weeps over the baby. Until that moment, even the moans and sighs were delightful, as they were sweet and dovelike. At this point, an Innocent reading can be pursued, which sees her weeping as the "wept for joy" of the "Introduction."[51] By confronting such pure Innocence, her similar feelings are also empathically summoned. The mother even sees in her child's face a resemblance to Jesus, "thy maker," who "wept for me for thee for all." Jesus's weeping, hinting at the crucifixion, was the purging of our sins.

In the last stanza, He does not weep anymore, but smiles. Bloom notices the transition from the past of the penultimate stanza to the present of the last one (BLOOM, 1963, p. 46). This transition is crucial: the events of Jesus's life are in the past, but for the mother He lives eternally, and His smiles, so similar to the smiles of a child, comfort us all. The smiles are similar because, for her, Jesus embodies the same kind of pure and benevolent Innocence found in her baby.

If an Innocent reading sees the mother's weeping as joyful, and her contemplation of the child as bringing Innocence to her life, an Experienced reading will read it quite differently. The weeping can be a sign of her own sadness, which she tries to purge away, even if unsuccessfully, by using two methods. The first one is what occurs before the twenty second verse (the verse where her weeping finally appears): she obsessively looks at her child in search of her lost Innocence. In this sense, the first stanza, in which she tries to guess what her child is dreaming of, can be read as a projection of her own desires: it is as if she wanted herself to be able to dream of "pleasant streams," but being unable to do so, wants to be

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[49] This poem appears in *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, page 468.

[50] Gillham makes an enlightening analysis contrasting both poems in his book (GILLHAM, 2009).

[51] I make an analysis of both "Introduction" poems in the next chapter.

satisfied by the thought that her baby is in that situation. The fact that she is up in the "livelong night," unable to sleep, is relevant, as her own insomnia makes her desire to sleep all the more pressing.

This projection onto her child does not make the tone of the poem bitter in any way: at least in this poem, she does not seem resentful. The tone is, instead, desperate, and her own projection into her baby can be seen as a desperate prayer. Better yet: her tone is desperate, but the reader is able to read her situation as a sad irony. The link with British Romantic irony's tonality is made here, as the tone ironically changes the poem's interpretation. The need to escape her own sad situation is so intense that she passes from her "Sweet smiles Mothers smiles" of the third stanza, to the weeping in the fifth stanza. The smiles were self-deceptive, but the weeping is not. Her decision to speak in the third person when talking about herself, in this sense, is also a way of escaping her situation, even when she smiles.

If the first method of purging her own sadness (the projection onto her child) brings her to tears, perhaps the second one could be more efficient. After the twenty second verse, she changes her attention to the child's resemblance to Jesus, and with this her own beliefs are briefly explained. The recurring to these beliefs is her second method, since they are also used to bring comfort. At first, her tone becomes darker, and she repeats "wept" two times with genuine sadness, as the story of Jesus reminds her of her own anxieties and difficulties—which are not clearly hinted at in the poem, however, but which an Experienced reading insists on seeing. It does not seem here that she is too preoccupied with her son: "Thy maker lay and wept for me / Wept for me for thee for all." The mention of her first, and twice, as the one who Jesus wept for shows her selfish concern.

The darker tone until this point gives way to what seems to be a happier one, with her belief in the present existence of Jesus. Again she talks about smiles, which are cited four times in the last five verses. But is this happiness in earnest? Is it not like the desperate projection of the first stanza? It seems that she wants to believe in this as much as she wants to see her child dreaming of "pleasant streams." If this is so, and the tone is similar to the first stanza's, the poem concludes in a circle, pointing back to the beginning. This creates a cruel irony: all of her concerns about herself are never resolved, since she is trapped in this cycle of escapism and fruitless faith without any action.

It should be noticed that her own trap is a trap of Innocence: her attentiveness to the child is akin to the fascination of Innocence, and her faith in a benevolent world is also part of

this state. This reading brings what is arguably one more point against the full commitment to Innocence, like the already cited *The Book of Thel*. The mother needs some sort of fall to be able to leave her difficult situation.

Figure 5: L 17 - "A Cradle Song"
(second plate)

Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Before trying to achieve a synthesis of both readings, the analysis of the second plate's design will reinforce them. The design shows the mother bending down attentively to her child, who seems to sleep calmly. For the Experienced reading, the bending down is a sign of her own desperate situation, and the dark fabrics on the background hint at her own dark feelings. An Innocent reading looks the bending down as the evidence of her attentiveness, as she needs to look so close to her son, and the dark fabrics are just a way to help diminish the light, making her son's sleep even calmer.

The main difference between the two readings is how they perceive the mother's situation. It could be argued that each reading sees in her a projection of their own feelings:

the Innocent reading sees her as reaching Innocence through the contemplation of her child; the Experienced reading sees her, on the other hand, as struggling desperately in Experience, in a doomed pursuit of Innocence.

The difference is perceived, for instance, in how they read the verb "to beguile," which appears three times in the poem: a) the Innocent reading sees only its positive aspect, closer to the verb "to charm," in the sense that she is charmed into Innocence; b) the Experienced reading passes through two levels: the first one is the mother's, in which the sense is, like the Innocent reading, positive. But, by ironizing the mother's words, a higher level is reached, in which "to beguile" acquires the negative meanings of trickery and deception—in this case, self-deception.

With all this, a synthesis that both acknowledges the fallen nature of the mother *and* her achievement of some brief moment of Innocence can be made. This possibility accepts the projection of the mother into the child, but does not see it as harmful. Instead, it sees as one of the steps towards the moment of Innocence she achieves. The step is relevant, but it is the attentiveness to her child that is vital. If in the first stanza she tries to guess what the child is dreaming of, following the logic of projection, in the next stanzas her contemplation of the child can be seen as becoming more genuine, which makes her prone to achieve Innocence. If the Experienced desire of achieving Innocence, by turning too forceful and anxious, prohibits it, her fist impulse turns into some degree of disinterestedness that allows it.

Her weeping, in this synthesis, is a return to Experience, and the following stanza, with all the "wept"s, follows this path. The belief in the present existence of Jesus of the last two stanzas, however, brings her again to a calmer mood. The ending, then, is happy, but not as much as in the Innocent reading, since the oscillation between Innocence and Experience, which occurs in the poem, hovers over it.

3.2 MERRY DRINKS AND FLOWER

The two poems just analyzed suggest some connection with religion, whether with God as shepherd or the figure of Jesus. The next two poems, "Laughing Song" and "The Blossom," do not touch on such issues, but are instead interested in a joyful here and now, whether in the party of "Laughing Song" or the fraternal contemplation of the birds in "The Blossom." The first, "Laughing Song," comes from what Gillham terms "a well-known and

persistent convention," the convention here being that of the "drinking song" (2009, p. 202). In this poem a genuine joyfulness is perceived, even if alcoholically induced. From an Innocent perspective, the poem is celebratory, urging the reader to join in the speaker's happiness of the moment.

Table 3 – "Laughing Song"

When the green woods laugh, with the voice of joy And the dimpling stream runs laughing by, When the air does laugh with our merry wit, And the green hill laughs with the noise of it. When the meadows laugh with lively green And the grasshopper laughs in the merry scene, When Mary and Susan and Emily, With their sweet round mouths sing Ha, Ha, He. When the painted birds laugh in the shade Where our table with cherries and nuts is spread Come live & be merry and join with me, To sing the sweet chorus of Ha, Ha, He. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 11)	Figure 6: L 26 - "Laughing Song"  Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

This perspective fits nicely in this case, since the poem has a tone of intense mirth. The verb "to laugh" occurs seven times in twelve verses. Not only animals, the grasshoppers and the "painted birds" laugh: the hilarity contaminates even the scenery in which the speaker is inserted, as the green woods and hills, the "dimpling stream" (the undulation of the stream

being the smile) and the meadows also laugh. In this state the speaker cannot but see the goodness and happiness in all that surrounds him.

Through such a perspective, Gillham's remark is very apt: "So universal is the laughter that the lines at the end of the poem, 'Come live & be merry, and join with me…' are less of an invitation than an expansive inclusion of his audience in a feeling of well-being" (2009, p. 202). The speaker's mirth contaminates the reader. The chorus to which we are invited/commanded to join is one of extremely simple music: "Ha, Ha, He," which itself mimics laughter. One possibility of reading this chorus is "as the spontaneous participation by the children in nature's prelinguistic, unformulated, and unfallen expression of well-being" (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 121). Through this possibility, the chorus is seen as an evocation, perhaps an invocation, of an unfallen state by adults.

Before starting the Experienced reading, I will comment briefly on the design. It shows a situation of mirth, with what probably is the speaker in the middle, as he occupies a central place in the design and seems to be making a speech, raising a toast with a hat on one hand and a cup on the other. His companions are sitting leisurely around the table, which is described in the tenth verse, and behind them verdant trees form a sort of frame for the scene. This scene reinforces the celebratory mood of the text. An Experienced reading will also perceive the celebration, even if including a bitter irony.

Even with the joyfulness expressed both in the text and the design, the presence of alcohol is an obvious mood enhancer. An Experienced reading cannot but focus at least some of its attention on this. The joy experienced in the situation depicted in the poem will be inevitably followed by some sort of fall. To enhance this reading, an analysis of the poem's structure will be helpful.

This poem consists of three stanzas, and is itself one single and complex sentence with several subordinate clauses. The subordinate clauses come first, starting either with "when," "and," "with," and "where"—the last two occurring only once. All of these connectors form what can be perceived as a list of conditions for the penultimate verse ("Come live & be merry and join with me") to be valid. With this in mind, all the joy of the poem, even if sincere, can only be achieved in very particular circumstances. Where is all the merriness when these conditions are not achieved?

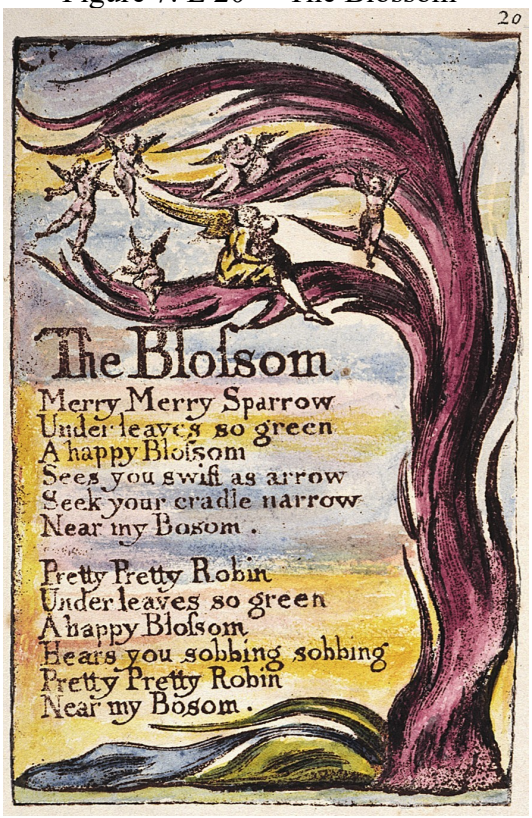
But, perhaps even in a more cruel way, maybe the joy is not genuine: it is itself a sort of hysterical escapism from a harsh reality. The chorus, then, is not a return to Innocence—

even though the speaker and his companions can believe in this—but a "sterile tautology of human language which, even at its least corrupted level, can only repeat itself, self-regardingly, as if at odds with the variety and plenitude of nature's natural voices" (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 121). The speaker and his companions are trapped in this self-repetition that only brings more need of escapism, which will turn into more sessions of this tragic kind of celebration.

For this poem, it may seem that the Experienced reading is too forceful. This is so because the Experienced reading focus on too tragic a view of the mirthful event. The view is, in itself possible. But perhaps the party, with all its happiness, is more akin to the organized Innocence of Eden. All the conditions just described are what makes the achievement of such state possible. This does not mean, however, that such conditions were pursued: they happened to occur in that moment, and their confluence is what brings the happiness. Such situation, even with Experience lurking somewhere, is a pause for mirth in a fallen world. This does not mean that a cautious attitude more fitted to Experience should be neglected, but it does not need to be the main attitude in this situation.

A pause for wonder is also perceived in "The Blossom." It presents a personified plant, the blossom, as its speaker. The poem consists of two stanzas of six verses each, with a pattern of repetition happening. The form is nursery-rhyme-y, and is linked by Damrosch with "Who killed Cock Robin," an English nursery rhyme first published in 1744 (2015, p. 59). In the first stanza, the blossom addresses a sparrow, who seeks his "cradle narrow" (a symbol for its nest) near him. In the second stanza, the blossom addresses a robin, who is "sobbing sobbing." Both birds are close to the blossom, and from both of them the blossom seems to derive the same kind of happiness.

Table 4 – “The Blossom”

Merry Merry Sparrow Under leaves so green A happy Blossom Sees you swift as arrow Seek your cradle narrow Near my Bosom. Pretty Pretty Robin Under leaves so green A happy Blossom Hears you sobbing sobbing Pretty Pretty Robin Near my Bosom. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 10)	Figure 7: L 20 - “The Blossom”  Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

An Innocent reading of this poem focuses its attention on the true happiness of the blossom, either when confronted with the sparrow’s swiftness or the robin’s sadness. Such positiveness the blossom derives from their proximity, regardless of the birds’ states. As Bloom argues, “it is enough that the joy or the sorrow takes place near its bosom” (1963, p. 40). Perhaps their proximity is something that comforts all of them: not only is the blossom happy for seeing the sparrow going towards its nest, but also its happiness irradiates and comforts the robin, in a circle of benevolent empathy.

Damrosch points to another interpretation, which fits an Innocent reading, in which an “allegory of birth is implied” in the poem (2015, p. 58). It should be noticed that the discovery that plants have sex was recent in Blake’s time, and Blake usually brings sexual overtones to flowers in *Songs* (DAMROSCH, 2015, p. 56). The off-rhyme blossom/bosom, happening in both stanzas, makes this connection clearer. As for the allegory, the sparrow is a

parent going to its nest to nurture the little birds, while the robin is a newborn. Even if it sobs, the prevalent feeling of who is seeing is of happiness, like the blossom. This is supported by the designs of the plate: if read clockwise, starting from the right, they seem to represent two angel-like figures playing, then embracing, immediately followed by a wingless baby—symbolizing the newborn robin, with the lack of wings showing its incapacity to fly. The baby appears then being nurtured by his mother, something that the sparrow is about to do in the first stanza. Following the cycle, the baby is now winged, studying perhaps, maturing, so that he too will be a parent in this cycle. The designs, if read like this, omit an important part of the cycle of life: death. But this is not for the Innocent perspective to question: it thrives, instead, in this positive cycle of reproduction.

An Experienced reading is obviously much more cautious about this. This reading sees the blossom as trapped in the Innocence without being able to realize the harshness of life. The happiness in face of the crying robin, if justified before, now seems problematic. Why is the robin sobbing? Or even, why is the sparrow flying "swift as arrow" to its nest? The blossom cannot perceive the difficulties that both birds can be subjected to at the moment. It can only be ignorantly content with their vision, and surmise that they were all as happy as it is. This attitude, depending on the birds' situations, can be cruel.[52]

In both readings a tendency to either ignoring or anxious overthinking is perceivable. And both of them have their own limitations: they contradict and ironize each other about their lack of abundance or preoccupation. This is where the dialectical irony of this poem lies: the reader can never commit completely to either of the readings, but instead needs to vacillate between the two possibilities for a fuller understanding.

3.3 CHILDREN OF INNOCENCE

None of the poems analyzed so far have the genuine subjects of Innocence, children, as their speakers. The next two poems, "The Ecchoing Green" and "The Little Black Boy," have children as speakers, and with this their perspective is analyzed.

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[52] I will not develop a reading in which the blossom is a sociopath and is being itself ironic about the birds' sorrows, but I suppose this is a possibility that would fit an Experienced reading—and also British Romantic irony's different tones.

Table 5 – “The Ecchoing Green”

The Sun does arise, And make happy the skies. The merry bells ring To welcome the Spring. The sky-lark and the thrush, The birds of the bush, Sing louder around, To the bells chearful sound. While our sports shall be seen On the Ecchoing Green. Old John with white hair Does laugh away care, Sitting under the oak, Among the old folk, They laugh at our play, And soon they all say. Such such were the joys When we were girls & boys, In our youth-time were seen, On the Ecchoing Green. Till the little ones weary No more can be merry The sun does descend, And our sports have an end: Round the laps of their mothers, Many sisters and brothers, Like birds in their nest, Are ready for rest; And sport no more seen, On the darkening Green. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 8)	Figure 8: L 5 - “The Ecchoing Green” (first plate)”  Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

In “The Ecchoing Green,” the three stanzas describe a day of rest and peace: children play while older persons look on and remember their youth. The speaker, a child who is playing with the others, narrates this day with what feels at first as genuine happiness. The first stanza is particularly cheerful, with “merry bells” ringing and several kinds of birds “sing[ing] louder around,” as if to celebrate the happiness of the children.

The second stanza reverts to “Old John,” an old man who is watching all this merriment. Other “old folk” are with him, and he seems to represent their attitude towards the children. This attitude is mainly one of nostalgia: the children’s fun reminds them of their own happy childhood. The last verse of this stanza repeats the first stanza’s last verse: “On the

Ecchoing Green." This time, however, as Bloom notices, the preceding verse utilizes a verb in the past tense instead of one in the present tense: "While our sports shall be seen" become "In our youth-time were seen" (1963, p. 41). There is a movement, then, from the here and now of the first stanza, to a sense of remembrance of things past. The sounds accompany this movement: no more the bells and birds are emphasized, but the laughing and talking of the old folk.

The setting of the third and last stanza seems to grow increasingly silent. It brings the end of the day, when "the little ones weary / No more can be merry." They go to the protection of their family, with "their many sisters and brothers" reinforcing the sense of belonging and community. The whole scene is related to a nest of birds, which puts the mothers—the only parents cited, being the nurturing center of the families—as the crucial providers and defenders of the children. The poem finishes in a somber tone, with a variation on the last verse: "And sport no more seen, / On the darkening Green." Not only has the sound stopped, but also the actions of the people, since the night has come and everyone is asleep. In this sense, the turn from "Ecchoing Green" to "darkening Green," from sound to sight, or better yet from the presence of sound to the absence of sound and sight, is relevant, as the "darkening" more clearly crowns the end of the day.

Before commenting on the darker implications of these last verses, which are difficult to ignore even in an Innocent reading, I will comment on the designs of both plates through the perspective of Innocence. The design above the text in the first plate displays in its center a large tree: it can be seen as the nurturing center of the poem, and also as a symbol of the mother bird of the last stanza. The younger kids are affectionately closer to their mothers, who are sitting under the tree. A man with a hat and white hair, possibly Old John, is also sat under the tree. Surrounding them, and also surrounding the text, older children play different games. In the next plate, it is already night, and Old John gently guides the children, pointing somewhere outside the plate, while most children attentively look to him.

Figure 9: L 6 - “The Ecchoing Green”
(second plate)

Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Even if this Innocent reading is possible, a lot of different aspects of the poem and the designs seem to question it. This occurs because the speaker, who is himself in a state of Innocence, cannot account for the incongruities in the poem and the designs. Inevitably, we can see the speaker’s way of seeing the world crumbling apart. The last two verses are a good indication of this. The turning from an “Ecchoing” to a “darkening Green” cannot help but bring to mind the whole movement of the poem, from the beginning of the day to its end. The trope of comparing the cycle of the day with the life of men, as in *Oedipus Rex*’s riddle of the sphinx, is pervasive enough in literature for the non-innocent reader not to make this link here. The ending, then, might be pointing to death, even though the speaker is not aware of it. In this sense, perhaps the first stanza’s true Innocence functions as a kind of counterpoint to the more dubious character of the other stanzas. As we turn from an Innocent reading to an Experienced one, the celebratory tone of the first stanza will turn instead to a mocking or even bitter tone.

The nostalgia of the second stanza gains a darker tone in this reading, specially because of the line "Does laugh away care." Keeping in mind that this sentence is uttered by a child, it brings with it the aspect of the British Romantic irony concerning children's ironic character. An Experienced reading brings to this line a melancholic preciseness: even if the speaker just meant to emphasize the happy effect of the children's play on the old folk, the care which needs to be laughed away is still there. This care can be connected to the state of Experience itself, and also to their approaching death, which is implicit in the movement of the poem from morning to night. It is as if the old folk's only possibility is to be distracted from their own anxieties by seeing and remembering Innocence.

As for the last stanza, the possessive pronouns hint at the speaker's place in the community. If, at first, he[53] says that "our sports have an end," uniting him with the other children as it happened earlier, in the following verses there is a change to the third person plural. In these verses he comments on the family of the children, which makes him distance himself from what is happening. This suggests that he is an orphan, only able to see, but not to experience, the comforts of the mother's nest. The possibility of the speaker being an orphan is reinforced by the designs: only one bird—i.e. alone—appears in both plates. This bird, then, symbolizes the speaker, and in an Experienced reading it is possible to perceive this design of the single bird as a cruel irony, when contrasted with the warmth of the family of birds described in the last stanza.

Not unlike other poems of "Innocence,"[54] even though living in a harsh reality, the speaker cannot but observe with tenderness and optimism his situation. In this case, he does not comment on the other children and their families with any contempt, irony, or bitterness. If in an Experienced reading we read his words as irony, we do not read them as a verbal irony, but as a situational irony. It is not the speaker's intention to be ironic, but we grasp an irony in the fact that he so tenderly comments on other children's families without having one of his own. If the speaker had fallen already into a state of Experience, such depiction would denote a remarkable stoic posture towards life, perhaps even a higher innocence; but this is not the case. The designs on the second plate tellingly hint at an imminent fall: a naked boy reaches for a bunch of grapes in the left, while in the right, a boy on a tree offers a bunch of

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[53] I consider him to be a little boy, instead of a little girl, because of the two boys which surround the text in the first plate, who are very similar and can be seen not only as the same boy, but also as the speaker of the poem.

[54] Such as the next poem analyzed, "The Little Black Boy," and "The Chimney Sweeper" of "Innocence," analyzed in the next chapter.

grapes to a girl. Despite the inversion of the genders, the depiction is close enough to Adam and Eve's story. The fall is there, but it has not occurred yet. Its imminence makes the irony grasped in the speaker's last stanza all the sadder, as the ignorance of his own situation is about to be erased.

Both Innocent and Experienced readings I just developed can be tentatively synthesized through a different reading of the second stanza. Instead of relying too much on the happiness of the situation, or in its despair, the old folk's attitude can be seen as one way out of Experience. By laughing away care, they are able to enter, if for a moment, into a state of Innocence. This dialectical interplay between both states is one of the ways through which the older people of the poem can achieve the more serene state of Eden. If complete Innocence is impossible for them, this organized innocence brings aspects of Innocence and Experience that lead them to a calmer life.

In this sense, the positioning of this stanza in the middle, balanced by the earlier pure Innocence and the later more adequate to Experience, needs to be emphasized, as it reinforces its role as the synthesis, the connection between both states. This stanza is also the only one explicitly concerning older persons, which are the only characters in the poem, apart from the mothers, who already fell from Innocence, making adult readers identify themselves with their nostalgic attitude.

"The Little Black Boy," also spoken by a child, brings for the reader, together with "The Chimney Sweeper," one of the most explicit ironies of "Innocence." Because of this, an Innocent reading of these poems is consciously self-blinding, showing a positiveness in face of a harsh reality that is either sad or outrageous. For this poem, I start with an Experienced reading, since these aspects are more prominent.

Table 6 – “The Little Black Boy”

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child:
But I am black as if bereav’d of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree
And sitting down before the heat of day,
She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And pointing to the east began to say.

Look on the rising sun: the God does livelong
And gives his light, and gives his heat away.
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive
Comfort in morning joy in the noon day.

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

For when our souls have learn’d the heat to bear
The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice.
Saying: come out from the grove my love & care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.

Thus did my mother say and kissed me,
And thus I say to little English boy.
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy:

Ill shade him from the heat till he can bear,
To lean in joy upon our fathers knee.
And then I’ll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him and he will then love me.

(BLAKE, 1988, p. 9)

Figure 10: L 8 - “The Little Black Boy” (first plate)

Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Figure 11: L 9 - “The Little Black Boy” (second plate)

Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

The poem is spoken by the little black boy himself, and starts contrasting the colors white and black. In the second verse, his position as to the hierarchy of the colors is already made evident: “And I am black, but O! my soul is white.” It is as if he is making an excuse for his color, as if it is some kind of fault that needs explaining. The whiteness of the English child, on the other hand, is treated by him as the ideal, and white is used in a simile that has the other child compared to an angel in the third verse: “White as an angel is the English child.” The speaker, perhaps unknowingly, also compares himself to an angel, but a fallen one: his color makes him appear to be “bereav’d of light.” This phrase, according to Ferber, “belongs to theological tales about fallen angels who have become black devils by rebelling against the light of God” (1991, p. 12). Furthermore, the choice of “bereav’d” points to the use of black as a sign of bereavement,[55] which makes the speaker, in this sense, in mourning throughout his life.

In the next stanza, the boy recollects when his mother taught him her version of Christianity, which is fused with the animist identification of God with the sun. In his recollection, the sun is rising, and both mother and child are sitting “underneath a tree,” to protect themselves from the heat of the sun—a peculiarly intense one, since they are “in the southern wild.” The intensity of the sun and the protection of the tree will play a significant role in his mother’s explanation, which occurs in the next three stanzas.

In the mother’s explanation, God lives in (or is Himself) the sun, giving both light and heat for “flowers and trees and beasts and men.” This light and heat are not for them to survive, or at least that is not what is said, but for them to be comforted and joyful. In the climate to which they belong, however, they are not comforting, but oppressive, so great their intensity. Still, according to the mother such oppressiveness needs to be celebrated.

She also gives the boy a teleological meaning of life: “And we are put on earth a little space, / That we may learn to bear the beams of love.” Life’s finality is then to “learn to bear the beams of love.” The verb “to bear” is ironically apt, even though she is unwillingly ironic. The beams do need bearing, and their assumed love can be by now read with suspicion —why is this love bearable, instead of having a more positive reaction? While the sun cannot be changed and needs to be dealt with somehow, the earlier juxtaposition of sun and God leads to another possibility, that of the need to bear the “beams of love” of religion—in this

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[55] Even though not all cultures associate black with bereavement, Blake’s England certainly did so. Paul S. Fritz, in an essay on clothing in occasions of royal deaths in England, comments on what he terms the “Black Trade” as “the trades and industries affected by a royal death” (1982, p. 292).

case a systematically oppressive religion that demands adoration and needs bearing. The word "beams" is ambiguous too: it both relates to the sunshine, and to a heavy piece of wood (a cross?) used in construction.

The next two verses of this third stanza, as well as the following one, can be read as a rationalization of the burden not only of their skin color, but also of sun/religion's oppression: "And these black bodies and this *sun-burnt face* / Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove" (my italics). The "shady grove" simile is represented by the tree below which they are seated, and together with the cloud metaphor they suggest their usefulness as protection from the sun. However, the sun-burnt face is not a protection *per se*—a characteristic that could be argued about the black body—but a symbol of the continued subjection to oppression.

In the following verses, the mother explains that the bearing of such difficulties will bring them a sort of apocalypse: "the cloud will vanish," as if the body does not matter anymore, and they "shall hear [God's] voice," and rejoice like lambs around Him. In this Experienced reading, the promise of such an apocalypse is not that tempting, and does not seem worthy if the difficulties to get there are considered. One can even question such belief in that it appeases the believers even when their situations is too harsh or cruel not to be rebelled from. In order to support this reading, it should be noticed that this poem was written in a period of "philanthropic agitation of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade" (ERDMAN, 2015, p. 132). Through this perspective, the belief of mother and child is read ironically: it does not agree with them, and responds to it with a sad anger.

Nevertheless, the boy internalizes the mother's explanation, and in the last verses addresses himself to "little English boy," explaining how he perceives his apocalyptic future. He and the English boy will rejoice like lambs around God, but he will still have to shade the English boy "from the heat until he can bear." That is to say, even then he will have to be subservient by shading the English boy, who will learn "to lean in joy upon our fathers knee." Again, the verb "to bear" brings an ironic contrast to this passage, since "to lean in joy" is not something that needs any bearing, being a pleasant thing. However, as in the mother's utterance earlier, this kind of adoration is problematic, related as it is to the intense sun of the southern wild.

The last verse needs some consideration: "And be like him and he will then love me." The speaker unknowingly shows his desire of being like the white boy, because what he just said contradicts his sentence: it is the white boy, after being shaded by him, that will

become like him. Through his reasoning, the speaker fits the irony of the child of British Romantic irony: by showing his desire of becoming like the white boy, he more accurately reveals an aspect that motivates the mother's explanation. Her explanation covers the degree of the black and white boys' differences and similarities with the cloud metaphor, but its utility is to make the black boy, in a sense, become the white boy, in the projection of its apocalyptic explanation.

In this Experienced reading, we cannot escape from the chronological distance we have from Blake, since in this poem it will add yet another aspect of Experience. Blake's depiction of the beliefs of the poem's characters is eminently Christian, even if sprinkled with odd aspects. If earlier in this reading I considered the burden of the black color, one is reminded also of the colonialist "White man's burden." The Christian aspects of the poem makes the African religions not only inferior, but even not worth noticing. In this sense, Blake colonizes the characters' perspective, even if his earlier mentioned antislavery intentions are still depicted. The animism of merging God and sun sounds like a condescension from Blake, even as if it would make the mother and the child more pitiful.

If the theological aspects of Christianity were not grasped by the reader (including the mention of lambs) the second plate of the poem makes them explicit.[56] The design depicts the speaker's apocalyptic vision: a figure resembling conventional depictions of Jesus is in its center, seated under a tree. The white boy prays with fervor in front of this figure, while the black boy seems to support him with his hand on the white boy's shoulder. The black boy is slightly behind the white boy, playing a secondary role to the white boy's meeting with Jesus. Also, he is not displaying any sign of devotion towards the Jesus figure, making his role in the design almost misplaced.

Going back to the previous plate, the design depicts the situation of the second stanza, with mother and son below a tree, and the boy pointing to the tree. As mentioned, the tree gives the protection from the intensity of the sun, and is related to the characters' skin color in the text through the "shady grove" simile. Throughout the poem the speaker comments on issues of skin color, and it is apt that he is pointing to the tree, considering how obsessively he insists on the theme. The protection of the tree here is physical, like the protection his skin color gives him from the sun. However, such protection is problematic: the

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[56] I will not comment on the skin color of the boys in this plate, because it varies among the colored versions of this poem—the boy praying is invariably fair skinned though. Ferber argues unconvincingly that "there is no correct way to colour them" (1991, p. 15).

design shows the sun below the tree top line. Hence, at that point at least the tree was not shading the characters: it was an illusory protection.

Turning again to the second plate, there is also a tree, which seems odd in this context. Why in the speaker's apocalyptic vision would the protection of a tree be necessary? For shade from which intense sun would it be useful? One possibility of interpretation is that the necessity of protection—both physical and psychological—has been so much internalized by him that he cannot help but imagine a tree there. This possibility makes his vision gain an ironic aspect, even if a bitter one: even in his "happy ending" there would be a need for protection from something.

I will come back to another possibility later on, but now I turn to my Innocent reading, which will definitely seem naive. It needs to be emphasized, however, the true optimistic tone of the speaker, and how his mother's beliefs truly comfort him. There is no despair in his tone. This happens, of course, because he is still innocent, unable to perceive the cruelties of his situation. If on the first stanza the contrast between him and the English boy demonstrates his sadness, the rest of the stanzas are mostly about the speaker committing to his belief—which he got from his mother. It should be noticed that his mother's explanations are not entirely innocent, but include aspects of Experience in a way that the boy could understand. The "beams of love" that need bearing turn the cruelties of life into more approachable realities. They will happen, and to them possibly the only way to face these cruelties is with some kind of meek rationalization such as the mother gave, not unlike Gospel of Matthew's "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (BIBLE, Matthew, 5, 5).

As for the speaker's apocalyptic vision, the English boy enters it in an inferior position, since he has not developed an endurance as the speaker has before. This possibility makes the figure of the black boy in the second plate not as subservient or secondary: he becomes a guiding superior, teaching and shading the white boy while he learns to be in the presence of Jesus. The interpretation of the last verse becomes very different from the Experienced reading: the black boy will be like the white boy is now, in the sense that he will be the one pitying the other. With this inversion, the white boy will "fall" from his position, and will finally be able to love the other as his equal.

With these two readings developed, we can notice that the main aspect which causes a tension between them is the utility of the mother's explanation, and the black boy's apocalyptic vision. While the Innocent reading becomes a more optimistic way of seeing

them, the Experience reading criticizes several of their aspects. These readings become a dialectical irony, one ironizing the other.

If some kind of synthesis can be achieved here, I believe it is to be found in the design of the second plate, more specifically in the function of the tree in this plate. In the Experienced reading, its function was a sort of symbol of the speaker's need for protection that ironically persists in his "happy ending." The possibility of synthesis is that indeed some kind of oppressive sun—and I use the expression as a metaphor for systematic religious oppression, as I did earlier—will always be there; however, now this Jesus figure is present. And this Jesus, which does not represent established religion, but inner, Innocent spirituality, is paired in the design with the Experience on the threshold that is the tree.

4 IRONIC TENSIONS IN THE MIRROR POEMS

Now that the analyses of single poems in the "Innocence" section is completed, I proceed to analyze the mirror poems. The method now will slightly change, since the Innocent and Experienced readings of the last chapter will not be used. Instead, I first analyze each poem according to their own state: the poem from "Innocence" of the pair is the first to be analyzed, following a method similar to the Innocent reading of the last chapter. This reading is ironically responded to by the poem from "Experience," which is then analyzed with the aim of revealing the incongruities. But this poem does not have itself all the answers, and at some point Innocence can dialectically retort. In the end, a synthesis of both contrasting views is made.

I will tackle some issues separately, beginning with questions of communication, where I analyze both poems titled "Introduction," and also "Infant Joy" and "Infant Sorrow." Then I proceed to analyze "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," which deal with the problem of evil. Going to less abstract ideas, a vein of social critique is exposed in both "The Chimney Sweeper" and in both "Holy Thursday," which retain the same title in both sections. The last mirror poems, "The Divine Image" and "The Human Abstract," bring both abstraction and social critique together, and because of their focus on ideas and argument they seem to be representative of the states of Innocence and Experience, and hence an apt pair to conclude the chapter.

4.1 MIRROR POEMS AND IRONY IN COMMUNICATION

The first set of mirror poems to be analyzed are in fact the very first poems of each section. Each "Introduction" brings a speaker that seems to occupy the role of author of the poems of their sections. I will not treat them as authors or speakers of other poems,[57] but it should be noticed that their tone and ideas will permeate most of the poems of each section. This happens because these speakers seem to embody in their poems their respective states. In the specific case of this set of poems I will also consider "Earth's Answer" in the analysis. I am doing so because "Earth's Answer" explicitly dialogues with the "Introduction" from

[57] I hinted at this in the earlier analysis of "The Shepherd," though.

"Experience."[58] In this sense, "Earth's Answer" functions more as a continuation of the second "Introduction," and does not work as well as a standalone poem. The plates immediately preceding the introductory poems of both section in most editions, those depicting a man with a child above his head, one for each section, will also be considered, because they illustrate these mirror poems.

Table 7 – First "Introduction"

Piping down the valleys wild Piping songs of pleasant glee On a cloud I saw a child. And he laughing said to me. Pipe a song about a Lamb; So I piped with merry chear, Piper pipe that song again— So I piped, he wept to hear. Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe Sing thy songs of happy chear, So I sung the same again While he wept with joy to hear Piper sit thee down and write In a book that all my read— So he vanish'd from my sight. And I pluck'd a hollow reed. And I made a rural pen, And I stain'd the water clear, And I wrote my happy songs Every child may joy to hear (BLAKE, 1988, p. 7)	Figure 12: L 4 - First "Introduction"  Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

The first "Introduction" brings a piper as the speaker, who enjoys himself, making music in the midst of nature ("Piping down the valleys wild / Piping songs of pleasant glee"). He encounters a child on a cloud, who asks/demands him to play some music, who disappears after some demands, leaving the piper writing the songs that "Every child may joy to hear." The poem, in a first reading, is revealing of an Innocent attitude towards life, which is in fact

[58] I will sometimes refer to these poems as first and second poems, meaning, respectively, the "Introduction" from the "Innocence" and the "Introduction" of the "Experience." The same logic will be used for other pairs: the first poem is for the one in "Innocence" and second for the one in "Experience."

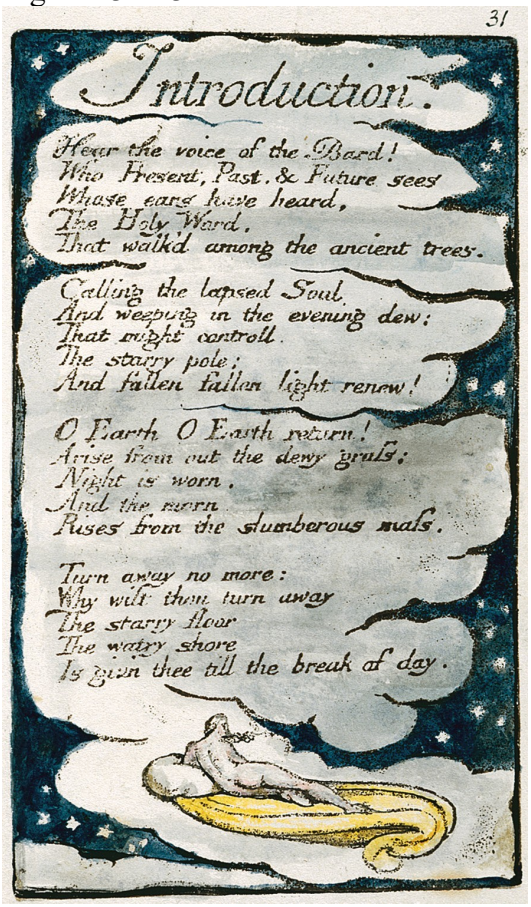
the state the piper seems to be in in the poem. The piper seems to be happy, as his diction emphasizes, with word choices such as “pleasant glee,” “joy,” “laugh,” “happy.” He also seems inspired, being able to either pipe, sing, and write down his artistic creation with no effort at all.

Notice that I am modalizing his attitude and the child’s demands because this will be complicated when contrasted with the other “Introduction.” For now, however, it would suffice to notice that the word choices either refer to the songs or to the child, never to the piper himself. Nevertheless, the piper’s attitude can be seen as genuine, and in this sense his encounter with the child—either an actual flying child, a projection of his mind, or a representation of the piper’s imagination—is a positive dialogue: the want of an aesthetic experience (that of the child) and the production of this experience (that of the piper).

The positive aspect of the dialogue is emphasized in the plates: on each side of the text, a tree, with what seems for a contemporary reader a sort of DNA shape, stands. The shape itself hints at a dialogue, with approach and distancing, but which ultimately creates an organic being, the tree itself. Both trees also touch in the top of the page, hinting at a higher connection. The small designs inside the tree frames seem to depict persons and nature together.

If the “Introduction” to the “Innocence” depicts a positive dialogue, the one from “Experience,” when paired with its dialogical counterpart (which works as a coda), “Earth’s Answer,” depicts instead a negative dialogue. In the beginning of this “Introduction,” the speaker presents himself as “the Bard,” in the very first verse (“Hear the voice of the Bard!”). He has a prophetic vision, seeing “Present, Past & Future,” and grants to himself the authority of having heard “The Holy Word, / That walk’d among the ancient trees.”

Table 8 – Second “Introduction”

Hear the voice of the Bard! Who Present, Past, & Future sees Whose ears have heard, The Holy Word, That walk’d among the ancient trees. Calling the lapsed Soul And weeping in the evening dew: That might controll, The starry pole; And fallen fallen light renew! O Earth O Earth return! Arise from out the dewy grass; Night is worn, And the morn Rises from the slumberous mass. Turn away no more: Why wilt thou turn away The starry floor The watry shore Is giv’n thee till the break of day. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 18)	Figure 13: L 31 - Second "Introduction"  Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

The second stanza poses a difficulty coming from its syntactic undecidability (FERBER, 1991, p. 21). In fact, it is possible to link such difficulty with British Romantic irony’s syntactic tensions. Who is “Calling the lapsed Soul / And weeping in the evening dew?” Two possibilities arise: it is either the Bard or the Holy Word, i.e. either the subject (the speaker) or the object, ironically confounding them just as Simpson argues about British Romantic irony. The choice also qualifies the next difficulty in the stanza: that of choosing between seeing “That might controll” as parallel to “That walk’d among the ancient trees” (in this case, having the “Calling” passage refer to the Holy Word) or as having “lapsed Soul” as its subject (having the “Calling” passage refer to the Bard). If, as Ferber chooses, the subject of the second stanza’s first verse is the Holy Word, the scene of God encountering Adam and Eve after the Fall is hinted at (1991, p. 22). If the subject is the Bard, on the other hand, the

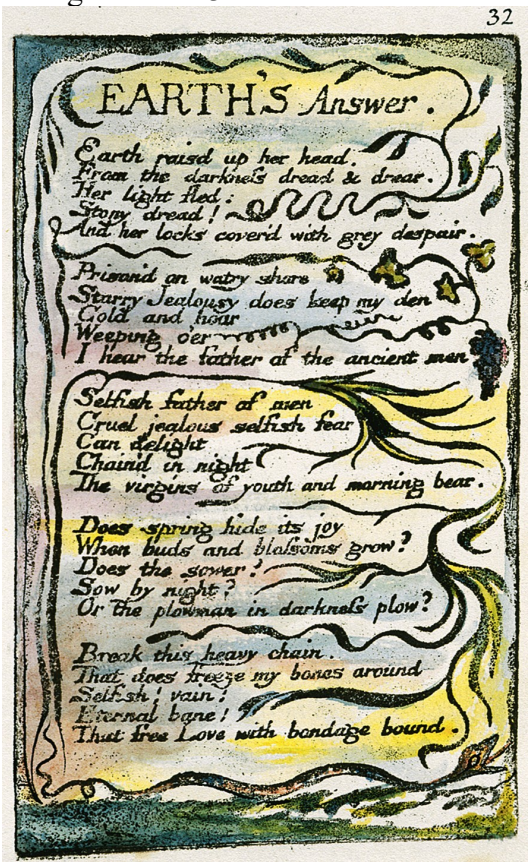
Bard arrogates to himself even more authority, as the one who can call on lapsed Souls, distancing himself from these souls, but also putting on them the potentiality for renewing the "fallen fallen light."

The second part of the poem is an intimation to the Earth. The Bard's plea is that the Earth "Arise from out the dewy grass" and to "Turn away no more." From his words, a great deal of sexual tension is perceived. It is as if the Bard is trying to woo the Earth, who seems to act like a coy mistress: he asks her to return and stop turning away. In order to convince the Earth, the Bard gives reasons: in the third stanza, he says that the morning is rising; in the fourth stanza, he hints at her possibilities if she acquiesces to his wish by saying that she will have "The starry floor / The wat'ry shore" to herself.

I use the feminine to refer to the Earth advisedly, since the design of this plate can be interpreted as a depiction of the Earth. The woman seductively looking over shoulders is how the Bard sees the Earth: sensual, but distant. The flower or blanket in which she is laid down is also suggestive of sexuality, resembling a vulva. The woman of the plate, then, is a sort of mental image of Earth created by the Bard, and the sexual hints do not seem to be just a creation of the Experienced reader, but actually an expression of the Bard's own sentiments.

If the Bard sees Earth in this sexual way, that does not seem to be so when it is actually the Earth talking. The Bard already hints at Earth's despair, when he commands her to rise "from the slumberous mass." But his fixation on the Earth's sexuality does not permit him to see her actual state of sadness, which he takes as a kind of sexual game played by her. Her situation becomes obvious in the first stanza of the following poem, "Earth's Answer:" "Earth raisd up her head. / From the darkness dread & drear." This is not the attitude of a coy mistress, but of someone in actual pain, dismissing the Bard's wooing not out of timidity, but out of "grey despair."

Table 9 – “Earth’s Answer”

Earth rais’d up her head, From the darkness dread & drear. Her light fled: Stony dread! And her locks cover’d with grey despair. Prison’d on watry shore Starry Jealousy does keep my denunciation Cold and hoar Weepin o’er I hear the Father of the ancient men Selfish father of men Cruel jealous selfish fear Can delight Chain’d in night The virgins of youth and morning bear. Does spring hide its joy When buds and blossoms grow? Does the sower? Sow by night? Or the plowman in darkness plow? Break this heavy chain, That does freeze my bones around Selfish! Vain! Eternal bane! That free Love with bondage bound. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 18-19)	Figure 14: L 32 - “Earth's Answer”  Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

To the Earth, “The starry floor” becomes a “Starry Jealousy,” and “The watry shore” makes her a prisoner. That is to say, the Bard’s wooing is in fact referring to things that are oppressing her. Her bitterness is specially directed to “the father of the ancient men”—the epithet bringing to mind the God of the Old Testament. To her he is “Cruel jealous selfish,” since he keeps the “delight / Chain’d in night.” With this He separates sexual delight from everyday life, by turning it into something secretive. This God, then, is a tyrant, creating unnatural and oppressive rules.

Earth’s rhetorical questions of the fourth stanza touch obliquely on this aspect of sexuality, by referring to the budding of flowers and the sowing of plants. These organic processes, connected with reproduction, do not occur at night; hence, the sexual delight also

should not. The hiding of the joy, in the first verse of this stanza, makes explicit the secrecy and connected senses of shame and guilt developed by these rules.

The last stanza is ambiguous, as it is difficult to assert to whom the Earth is talking. She is either talking to God or to the Bard. If she is talking to God, the reader knows, as well as the Earth herself, that her words are useless, and become just an actualization of her sad bitterness. In this sense, she is also correct, and the last verse ("That free Love with bondage bound") is especially efficient—only rhetorically. If, on the other hand, the Earth is talking to the Bard, she throws all of his wooing back to him. The breaking of the "heavy chain" will come from the Bard's own efforts. With this, her attitude towards the Bard is also made bitter. This is so not only because of his inaction, but also his replication, in a sense, of God's rules. His wooing sees the Earth with God's rules as preconceptions, in the way that her perceived timidity is a given, an aspect of the hiding of the joy about which the Earth complains.

Whether it is God or the Bard who is the interlocutor of the last stanza, the fact is that Bard and Earth cannot understand each other. Better yet, the Earth may understand the Bard in his alienated and sexually driven pursuit, but the Bard certainly cannot understand her. This miscommunication, or even misconception, is one of the causes of the Earth's despair, if not the main cause. Also, such miscommunication, and the non-resolution occurring in the last stanza, creates a dichotomy.

If we take now both "Introduction" poems and contrast them, this aspect of communication is perceptibly contrary in them. The miscommunication, and the lack of dialogue of the second "Introduction" emphasizes the positive dialogue, and the effectual interplay between the piper and the child in the first one, and vice-versa. One poem ironizes the other: considering the communication presented in the first poem as the ideal, the second poem, together with "Earth's Answer," antithetically ironizes this ideal, because of its impossibility of existence in the world of Experience, but the utter lack of communication of the Experienced poem is also questioned by the possibility of it in the Innocent one, as the piper and the child create a dialogue of positive demands and answers. In this sense, the aspect of communication of both "Introduction" poems does not need to be seen as a dichotomy in the same way as the dialogue between the Bard and the Earth. Even though such views are irreconcilable, a dialectical process can be seen as hovering between them, as some degree of communication is possible after all.

Another aspect of the poems which can be contrasted is the way in which both speakers refer to themselves. In fact, the first speaker, the piper, does not refer to himself at all, but lets the child name him. The Bard, on the other hand, pridefully presents himself in the very first verse of his poem. Notice that I use capitalization when talking about the Bard, but not when referring to the piper. The word "Piper," with capitalization, is what appears in the Innocent poem, but such capitalization may occur, contrary to the Bard, because it appears as the first word in the two verses in which it occurs. If we cannot (and ought not to) speculate about Blake's intentions, I believe that the recourse to piper, instead of Piper, when referring to this speaker, is apt, especially when considered in contrast with the Bard.

In this sense, the piper is just someone who plays the pipe, his action at the moment, and not a definition of his being, as he will also become a writer by turning a "hollow reed" in a "rural pen." It is also impossible to take from the word "piper" the same connotations of status associated with the word "Bard." "Bard" carries with it a much stronger traditional, institutionalized sense—one thinks of Shakespeare's epithet, for instance. Such aspects are encountered in the poems of the respective speakers: the piper just pipes merry songs, and makes the child happy; the Bard, on the other hand, evokes his authority ("Whose ears have heard / The Holy Word") and makes commanding solicitations to the Earth.

The same sort of relation can be seen in the two plates depicting a man with a child above his head. The plates accompany the introductory poems of each section, and their similarities, as well as their differences, are yet more elements to be considered together with the introductory poems. The scene in itself of both is very similar (trees and sheep grazing in the back background, a man and a child in the front), and seems to be there to reinforce the differences, and to make the reader consider them. Because the scene so patently resembles what is happening in the first "Introduction," a connection between the first plate and the first poem is created. The same connection is then suggested between second plate and second poem: even though such connection is not so obvious, the contrast between both "Introduction" poems makes the link between second plate and second poem valid, since such link happens in "Innocence."

Table 10 – Illustrations for the “Introduction” poems

Figure 15: L 1 - Illustration from Innocence	Figure 16: L 29 - Illustration from Experience
	
Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).	Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).

Source: Made by the author (2019).

In the first plate, a piper stares amazed at a flying child, who has his arms spread as if saying “here I am!” The child is flying, but has no wings, and what can be a branch of a tree or the outline of a cloud is suggestively close to his navel, as if it was a recently-cut umbilical cord. Two trees frame the man and the child more or less symmetrically, with the right one having the same sort of DNA shape found in the trees framing the first poem. The second plate, on the other hand, depicts a man holding a child above his head, this time a winged child. Both of them have expressions in their faces which hint at tiredness and conformity. Two trees also appear, but the one on the right is much closer than the one to the left.

An irony appears when one looks at both children: the winged child is not flying, while the wingless child is flying. A possibility for this is that Innocence depicts the child ideally, a newborn in all of his magnificence, effortlessly flying as if to show his tremendous

potentiality; Experience, on the other hand, depicts the child's latent power in his wings, but needs to give him a direction, or perhaps more forcefully, feels the need to conform him to its own state. This is related to aspects in both poems: a) in the first one, to the dialogue of the piper and the child, which have an efficient communication, and, if there is a hierarchy, the child is higher, asking for actions which the piper promptly performs; b) in the second one, to the way in which the Bard claims to himself, as if securing it with him, the authority displayed in the first two stanzas.

The trees in both designs are also significant. In the first one, they give to the plate a symmetry and a balance; in the second one, a hierarchy is created between them because of their distance to the front of the picture. The symmetry of the first one converges with the efficient communication in the first poem. For the second one, it is not so much a matter of relating each tree to one of the speakers or to God, but to notice that this hierarchization is present, and is probably actualized by each speaker (Bard and Earth) differently. Not only is there a hierarchy, but the very distance between these trees, when contrasted with the ones from the first plate, are symbolic of the distance between the Bard and the Earth.

These sets of poems and plates are not easily reconcilable, especially because of the aspects of communication presented in them. I believe a fragment by Schlegel can be enlightening here: he says that Socratic irony "contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication" (1971, p. 156). The key concept here is "complete communication," the sort of communication seen in the first poem, and relativized in the second one. The antagonism to which Schlegel refers is similar to the one present in the poems. In the same fragment, Schlegel asserts that with Socratic irony's "means one transcends oneself," and that:

> It is a very good sign when the harmonious bores are at a loss about how they should react to this continuous self-parody, when they fluctuate endlessly between belief and disbelief until they get dizzy and take what is meant as a joke seriously and what is meant seriously as a joke. (SCHLEGEL, 1971, p. 156)

These poems indeed ironize each other, and our helplessness in choosing a way out of this is not only a part of it, but the very way in which the apprehension of a better solution, only hinted at, is possible.

Table 11 – “Infant Joy” and “Infant Sorrow”

Figure 17: L 23 - “Infant Joy”	Figure 18: L 39 - “Infant Sorrow”
 Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).	 Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).
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! Pretty joy! Sweet joy but two days old, Sweet joy I call thee; Thou dost smile, I sing the while Sweet joy befall thee. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 16)	My mother groand! my father wept. Into the dangerous world I leapt: Helpless, naked, piping loud; Like a fiend hid in a cloud. Struggling in my fathers hands: Striving against my swaglind bands: Bound and weary I thought best To sulk upon my mothers breast. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 28)

Source: Made by the author (2019).

The next pair of poems, “Infant Joy” and “Infant Sorrow,” also tackles communication problems, but this time with a different perspective. The communication here

has to do with how a child can be interpreted and spoken through adult perspectives. Both poems bring two layered speakers, in the sense that they speak through a child's perspective, posing as children when they are not. This brings the question of whether they are being empathetic with the children, or are just projecting their own perspectives onto them.

In "Infant Joy," the mother speaks the lines attributable to her newborn child. These are four: "I have no name / I am but two days old" and "I happy am / Joy is my name." The period of naming the child is relevant: according to Damrosch, "it was customary to baptize an infant on the third day after birth, at which moment the parents would confer its name" (2015, p. 56). Evidently, at this time of her[59] life, the baby is still in a pre-linguistic stage (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 53). This means that the mother reads Joy's words through her smile. Joy's seeming happiness, expressed by her smile, is happily interpreted by the mother as a sign of happiness.

The plate is, like "The Blossom," symbolic, and does not carry the same pastoral quality of poems such as "The Shepherd" and "Echoing Green." The flower is, again, a symbol of the recent birth or the uterus, and the mother and the child "unmistakably recall[s] paintings of the Virgin Mary adoring the Christ child" (DAMROSCH, 2015, p. 56). The fairy-like creature—not angelic because of its dotted wings—is possibly the one who brought the child to the mother (GILLHAM, 2009, p. 182). The baby is what everyone contemplates, either in the poem or in the design, and the reader is invited also to share the mother and child's happiness. This gets complicated, however, when "Infant Sorrow" is also considered.

In the second poem the speaker is also an adult, but this time pretending to be a newborn child. I make this interpretation not only based on other interpreters. The connections between sentences is different from the accumulating "and," "so," and other connectors used in poems in which the speaker is a child—examples can be found in "The Little Black Boy" and the first "The Chimney Sweeper."[60] The vocabulary is also too Experienced, unfit for a child, specially for a newborn, who evidently cannot speak.

Everything that happens in the poem is in the realm of Experience: his[61] "mother groand!" as if resenting the recent birth, his "father wept," possibly in desperation. The second verse ("Into the dangerous world I leapt") already implies a sort of fall: the newborn

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[59] Since Joy is a feminine name, I am considering the baby a little girl.

[60] Analyzed in section 3.3.

[61] I use here the masculine to more easily differentiate this child from the one in "Infant Joy." Here, however, there is no clue as to the child's gender.

willingly leaps and falls into the world of Experience without passing through Innocence. The speaker is also fiendish and non-conformist, always “struggling” and “striving against” something. Being so small, and unable to stand for himself, the newborn is only able “To sulk upon my mothers breast,” i.e. to build his bitterness and resentment from the very time he was born.

The design shows the mother bending to take her child. It is impossible to say if her attitude is of caring love or annoyed sadness: her face points to some dissatisfaction, but both possibilities are plausible. The child is desperately crying with his arms raised. He is not, however, looking at his mother; instead, he looks up, as if looking for another kind of assistance. His mother cannot heal his wound, whatever it is, and can only calm him down to a state of sulking paralysis.

“Infant Sorrow” seems more like an adult’s perspective through which infancy is viewed because of all the built-in bitterness and resentment of the poem. The speaker is in a state of Experience, and can only see Experience, even in a newborn child. But the same can be said about “Infant Joy:” there too the perspective of the mother is all-encompassing. Coleridge noticed that children of “two days old” do not smile, in order to disapprove of “Infant Joy” (apud DAMROSCH, 2015, p. 56). If such claim can be made, what needs to be perceived is not the impossibility of having a child so young to smile, but the plausible idea of having a mother seeing a smile where there is none. In this sense, the mother is, like the speaker of “Infant Sorrow,” putting her own feelings into the child. Ironically, neither the mother nor the second speaker can penetrate the feelings of the child, and the contrast of both poems makes this all the more evident.

It is possible to speculate that the mother in “Infant Joy” is so happy because of the too recent birth. Her enthusiasm is genuine, and is reflected in how she perceives her daughter. Her state of Innocence is, in this sense, much closer to the organized Innocence than it is to the Innocence of the chimney sweeper from “Innocence,” for instance. This should not be read, however, as having the bearing of a child as a way to achieve such a state. “Infant Sorrow” shows the difficulties of having a child from the very beginning too, as if the Innocent state of the mother is bound to turn into Experience again. The comparison of both children’s sizes is relevant: “Infant Sorrow” depicts a much larger and older child. Probably the enthusiasm of the birth has faded, and the “struggling” and “striving” become more prominent.

If read as such, some aspects of “Infant Joy” can be taken as foreshadowing the impending fall. The fairy-like creature, for instance, can be seen as intending to steal the child, its gesture depicting the impeding movement of grabbing the baby. Such event would throw both parent and baby into Experience. The flower appearing on the right side of the poem is withered, showing the next step in the blossoming flower’s cycle of life, and hinting at some withering of the feelings. The last verse of both stanzas (“Sweet joy befall thee”) brings the word “fall” inside “befall,” also hinting at the impending event. The ironies in these pair of poems go from the speaker of “Infant Sorrow” bitterly ironizing the happiness of “Infant Joy,” to the apprehension that both poems fail to represent the children’s own feelings, reflecting only the speakers’ feelings instead, which makes the aspects of “Infant Joy” just analyzed more visible.

4.2 “THE LAMB” AND “THE TYGER,” EVIL AND IRONY

If the pairs already analyzed dealt somehow with communication, the next two mirror poems, “The Lamb” and “The Tyger,” deal with the problem of evil. This is probably the best-known pair of poems in the *Songs*, and deals with two animals, mammals to be more specific, relying heavily on traditional meanings associated with them. The poem from “Innocence,” “The Lamb,” brings to the discussion aspects associated with animal sacrifices for religious purposes—such as occurs in several passages of the Old Testament—and, mainly, Jesus, “the Lamb of God” (BIBLE, John, 1, 29). “The Tyger,” on the other hand, deals with a particularly brutal predator, described in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1771) as “more ferocious, cruel, and savage than the lion” (ENCYCLOPAEDIA, 1771, p. 585). Both animals, in these traditional symbols, deal with the problem of evil (the lamb purging the sins, the tiger as a sort of incarnation of evil), but in slightly different ways.

Table 12 – “The Lamb” and “The Tyger”

(continues)

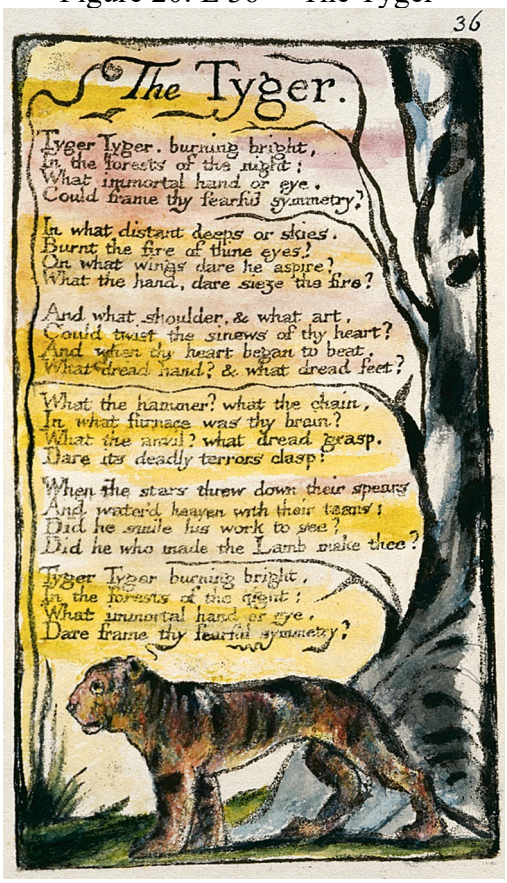
Figure 19: L 24 - “The Lamb”	Figure 20: L 36 - “The Tyger”
	
Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).	Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).
Little Lamb who made thee Dost thou know who made thee Gave thee life & bid thee feed. By the stream & o’er the mead; Gave thee clothing of delight, Softest clothing wooly bright; Gave thee such a tender voice, Making all the vales rejoice! Little Lamb who made thee Dost thou know who made thee	Tyger Tyger, burning bright, In the forests of the night; What immortal hand or eye, Could frame thy fearful symmetry? In what distant deeps or skies. Burnt the fire of thine eyes? On what wings dare he aspire? What the hand, dare sieze the fire? And what shoulder, & what art, Could twist the sinews of thy heart? And when thy heart began to beat, What dread hand? & what dread feet? What the hammer? what the chain, In what furnace was thy brain? What the anvil? what dread grasp, Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

Table 12 – “The Lamb” and “The Tyger”

(conclusion)

Little Lamb I’ll tell thee, Little Lamb I’ll tell thee! He is called by thy name, For he calls himself a Lamb: He is meek & he is mild He became a little child: I a child & thou a lamb, We are called by his name, Little Lamb God bless thee. Little Lamb God bless thee. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 8-9)	When the stars thre down their spears And water’d heaven with their tears: Did he smile his work to see? Did he who made the Lamb make thee? Tyger Tyger burning bright, In the forests of the night: What immortal hand or eye, Dare frame thy fearful symmetry? (BLAKE, 1988, p. 24-25)

Source: Made by the author (2019).

“The Lamb” has as its speaker a child, who addresses a lamb, telling it some of his beliefs. Comprised of two stanzas with ten verses each, the structure of the poem shows a simplicity which suits its infant speaker—as does the rhyme scheme in couplets. In the first stanza, the child asks the lamb who created it, answering himself the question confidently in the next stanza. As in other poems from the “Innocence,” the speaker uses several words that convey a sense of beauty and warmth: “clothing of delight,” “softest,” “wooly bright,” “rejoice.” The way the child addresses the lamb as “Little Lamb” is in itself revealing of this diction.

A similar mood is seen in the design of the plate, in which the child, looking at the lamb, is making a motion as if to embrace or caress it. The lamb, instead of grazing, is looking at the child in a seemingly content way. As in the introductory poem to the “Innocence,” two trees grow symmetrically on each side of the plate, and unite their foliage just below the title of the poem, in the upper part of the plate. Also, vines appear entangling the two trees. Even knowing that vines are parasitic plants, here they seem to mingle harmoniously with the trees, creating a sort protective, beautiful frame to the poem.

The union of the two trees in the upper part of the plate also seems to create a sort of roof to the scene. The roof, used for protection, can be linked with the protection of the twice cited “clothing” of the lamb. Both protections are physical, but the insistence on this makes more evident the protection of the child himself, this time both a physical and psychological one. In this sense, the house in the background hints at the presence of another kind of protection, the family.

The child himself does not comment on his family, possibly because this is to him a given, a normal situation. The family's protection is not only represented by the house, but also by the optimistic belief they instilled in the child. This belief is uttered by the child in the second stanza. Its optimism is yet more intense than the one seen in "The Little Black Boy," where an awareness of harshness in the world coexists with the boy's beliefs. Here, such an awareness is absent of his words, and the darker implications of what he says can only be seen by the Experienced reader. The child does not mention why Jesus "call[s] himself a Lamb:" the idea that Jesus is a lamb because he sacrifices himself for humanity is not present in the child's speech. What is present is the linking the child makes between the lamb and Jesus, because of their names, and then between Jesus and the child himself, since he and Jesus are or were little children. These two connections make the child identify himself with the lamb, an association which was not previously possible, and was made so by his logic. His logic may be naive, but is genuine.

Although a reading similar to the ones made in the last chapter is possible, as the child's naivete in his identification with lamb and Jesus can bring ironic overtones to the poem, I believe that the contrast of this poem with its counterpart in "Experience" is more productive. If in "The Lamb" the questions of the first stanza are firmly answered in the second one, in "The Tyger" all there is are questions. Conviction turns into doubt, optimism turns into despair.

The progression of the questions is something interesting to be analyzed, because such progression can give us a glimpse of the speaker's mind. In the first stanza, the question which will be refined throughout the poem is posed: who created the tiger, this "ferocious, cruel, and savage" beast (ENCYCLOPAEDIA, 1771, p. 585)? No human being, certainly, according to the speaker, since it was an "immortal hand or eye." In the next questions, there will also be presuppositions which the speaker brings to his doubts, and some even "outrace the implicit answers" (FERBER, 1991, p. 39).

The next question, the first from the second stanza ("In what distant deeps or skies. / Burnt the fire of thine eyes?") hints at some kind of malignity associated with this creator. In the next question ("On what wings dare he aspire?") the speaker is possibly thinking about Milton's Satan, as Damrosch argues (2015, p. 83). Bloom, however, finds yet another possibility: this question is considering Icarus, and the next one ("What the hand, dare sieze the fire?") is considering Prometheus (1963, p. 138). What all of them, Satan, Icarus, and

Prometheus share is their challenging attitude, which was not considered positive by a higher god, and culminated in their punishment.

Stanzas three and four consider the artificer who not exactly created the tiger, but forged it, as the speaker pauses amazed at the process of creation. Who, the speaker asks, "could twist the sinews of thy heart?" And with what instruments: "What the hammer? what the chain, / In what furnace was thy brain? / What the anvil?" Ferber hints at blacksmith gods, such as Hephaestus and Vulcan (1991, p. 39). I believe, however, that the emphasis of these questions is not in the allusion to such mythological beings, but on how the process of the tiger's creation becomes mechanical, instead of organic. The speaker is presupposing, here, an artificer forging the tiger with what he sees as necessary instruments: hammer, furnace, anvil. This is not, then, a creation *ex nihilo*. The turn to mechanism, instead of organism, brings with it questions of morality: a mechanism is in itself amoral, and the problem of morality, then, is more emphatically turned to the creator,

The fifth stanza brings, as several commentators agree, the most vexing question of the poem (BLOOM, 1963, p. 138; FERBER, 1991, p. 40; DAMROSCH, 2015, p. 83). The question ("Did he who made the lamb make thee?") is preceded by an obscure one, which does not seem to fit the rest of the poem: "When the stars threw down their spears / And water'd heaven with their tears: / Did he smile his work to see?." The first two verses make reference again to *Paradise Lost*: in this case, the stars who "water'd heaven" are Satan and the other fallen angels. If, on the preceding stanzas, the focus of attention was Satan, Icarus, and Prometheus, and their own implication in the creation of the tiger, with these verses and the following question ("Did he smile his work to see?") the implication is turned to the one who punished, i.e. God himself. God's smile would mean, then, his acquiescence and approval of the creation of the tiger. The next question ("Did he who made the Lamb make thee?") goes one step further, which is indeed a logical one. Being the supreme authority, God cannot be dismissed of his participation in the tiger's creation, even if other being is the actual creator. With this, maybe God can be himself attributed as the tiger's creator.

This question can be related to the issue of theodicy, the justification of the existence of evil in the world. If *Paradise Lost* is Milton's way to "justify the ways of God to men," the speaker of "The Tyger" is putting such possibility in check (MILTON, 2005, p. 4). The question is so vexing that, in a sense, the speaker becomes speechless: all he can do is repeat the first stanza of the poem, as if he is locking himself in his own argument. The last stanza is

indeed a repetition of the first one, but with a difference in its last verse: instead of using "could," the verse becomes "Dare frame thy fearful symmetry."

Does this mean that something between the beginning and the end have changed? Formally, the verse's first metrical feet, turning from an iamb into a spondee, gives a greater power to the verse because of the added (and consecutive) stress, imbuing it with a finality that can be linked to how the speaker answers the vexing question, even though he is not ready to admit it. On the other hand, the near identity between first and last stanza cannot but create a circularity. It is as if the speaker, recognizing the reasonableness of his logic so far—which cannot be denied, by the way—is not ready to admit its final conclusion, and is only able to start again, hoping that another possibility appears.

The speaker is locked in his argument and in Experience itself. For the Experience appears here as the speaker's inability either to look at his argument from another perspective, or to deal with the vexing question presented in some way. Furthermore, this question brings the Experience to the present moment, with its use of the verb tenses: the verb "to make" is used in the simple past for the lamb, but in the present for the tiger. In this sense, Innocence (represented by the child) is superseded by the evil.[62]

Before contrasting "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," I would like to point to the tension created by the text of "The Tyger" and its graphic elements. Such tension was noticed by several commentators. Some of them found in it a fault on Blake's part: Blake's inability to draw a tiger comparable to the one presented in the poem, according to them, diminishes the aesthetic experience. Others, such as Damrosch, see in this an ironic contrast, phrasing the issue as follows: "Experience speaks in the text; Innocence responds in the picture" (2015, p. 84). Damrosch's view, however, does not seem accurate: the design seems too overtly comic to be simply put as depicting Innocence. He disapprovingly quotes Jean H. Hagstrum, who seems to have a better reading: to him, the Tyger is "simpering" (apud DAMROSCH, p. 84). Bloom refrains from associating the design with Innocence, and terms the tension an "irony of contrast," where the Tyger of the design is seen as a "mild and silly, perhaps worried, certainly shabby, little beast" (1963, p. 137).

In order to refute Damrosch's view, some aspects of the design need to be taken into account. The imbalance created by the presence of the big tree in the right side is one of them.

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[62] Bringing the concept of evil here harks back to several interpretations of the poem, such as Damrosch's (2015) and Borges' (2006), which see the "tyger" as a symbol of evil. In this sense, the spelling might be suggestive of a symbolic tiger.

This imbalance contrasts with the symmetry of “The Lamb,” the same which occurred in the introductory poems already analyzed. The tiger of the design is not in a forest of the night, but neither it is in the pastoral landscape of “Innocence:” the vegetation is not luscious, there is no excessive use of flourishes garnishing the text—just stern lines, branches of the leafless tree. The irony, then, does not come from a contrast between Innocence and Experience, but from within Experience. To reach an ironic contrast between Innocence and Experience, both poems, “The Lamb” and “The Tyger,” need to be confronted. In this sense, the pair of questioning and confident answering of “The Lamb” is contrary to the unanswered questions and doubting circularity of “The Tyger.” The affection between child and Lamb, present both in text and design, is contrasted to the doubts, not only of the text of “The Tyger,” but also of the ironic doubting of the poem depicted in its design.

But is it possible to create a synthesis out of these two antitheses? Gillham finds a possible solution. In his analysis of both poems, he relies heavily in the assumption that Innocence and Experience form a dichotomy, and does not allow the existence of the dialectics which form the state of Eden, the organized Innocence. However, his argument about the presence of Innocence in “The Tyger” is compelling, and seems to fit Eden better than Innocence. The following sentence is exemplary: “‘The Tyger’ is a *Song of Innocence* rather than of Experience, though the speaker does not, on a first reading, seem to know God through the virtues of delight, his knowledge does come through his breathless wonder at the tiger” (GILLHAM, 2009, p. 247). While his point about “The Tyger” being a song of Innocence seems to me faulty, the possibility of finding in the tiger a wonder, “an occasion of innocent delight,” is a way through which an organized Innocence can be reached (GILLHAM, 2009, p. 246).

With the sets of mirror poems analyzed up to now, the questions which contrast them are related to abstract problems: communication of the “Introduction” poems and in “Infant Joy” and “Infant Sorrow,” the problem of evil in “The Lamb” and “The Tyger.” The next two pair of mirror poems, on the other hand, deal with social problems, making their discussions seem more urgent.

4.3 IRONIC SOCIAL CRITIQUE: “THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER” AND “HOLY THURSDAY”

The poems titled “The Chimney Sweeper,” one in each section, touch on issues related to social inequality and injustice, and have similarities with “The Little Black Boy.” Just as in “The Little Black Boy,” the poem from “Innocence” already brings explicit aspects of Experience, with its speaker—a child here too—creating rationalizations to cope with the harshness of his life.

Table 13 – The two “The Chimney Sweeper”

(continues)

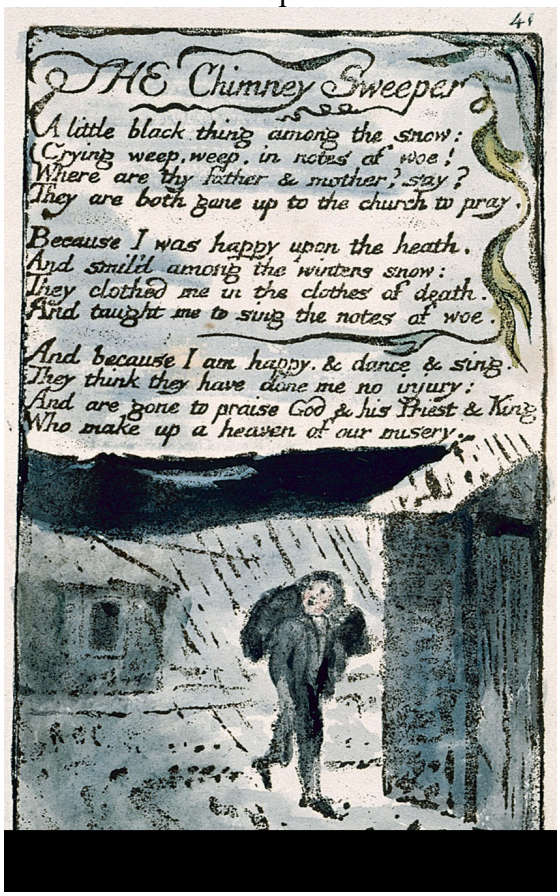
Figure 21: L 7 - “The Chimney Sweeper” from “Innocence”	Figure 22: L 41 - “The Chimney Sweeper” from “Experience”
	
Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).	Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).
When my mother died I was very young, And my father sold me while yet my tongue, Could scarcely cry weep weep weep weep. So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.	A little black thing among the snow: Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe! Where are thy father & mother? say? They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Table 13 – The two “The Chimney Sweeper”

(conclusion)

Theres little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head That curl’d like a lambs back, was shav’d so I said. Hush Tom never mind it, for when your head’s bare, You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair. And so he was quiet, & that very night, As Tom was a sleeping he had such a sight, That thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack Were all of them lock’d up in coffins of black, And by came an Angel who had a bright key, And he open’d the coffins & set them all free. Then down a green plain leaping laughing they run And wash in a river and shine in the Sun. Then naked & white, all their bags left behind, They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind. And the Angel told Tom if he’d be a good boy, He’d have God for his father & never want joy. 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. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 10)	Because I was happy upon the heath, And smil’d among the winters snow: They clothed me in the clothes of death, And taught me to sing the notes of woe. And because I am happy, & dance & sing, They think they have done me no injury: And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King Who make up a heaven of our misery. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 22-23)

Source: Made by the author (2019).

The pair of “The Chimney Sweeper” poems also deals with a theme that was being debated circa the writing of *Songs of Innocence*: “a piece of protective legislation for the ‘climbing boys’” was secured in 1788, with the aim of diminishing the atrocities perpetrated against the little chimney sweepers (ERDMAN, 2015, p. 132). The bill specified, for instance, the minimum age of eight for a boy—most often, but girls were also used—to become an apprentice, and “that they should no longer be forced to go up ignited chimneys.” The bill exemplifies the cruelties those children, whose parents were paid by the tutors, had to face. Sadly, even these modest reforms were not enforced at the time (ERDMAN, 2015, p. 132). Perhaps the crucial point here is how to deal with such a cruel issue in the light of Innocence.

If something similar was done with "The Little Black Boy," that poem did not have a counterpart in Experience, and with this the contrasting analysis I will make here is all the more relevant.

The speaker of the first poem starts with a brief account of his life in the first stanza. He is a chimney sweeper himself, and even though his fate is pitiable, his words are not self-pitying or uttered with the aim of raising the pity of the readers. The speaker is not aware of the injustice he is subjected to, and in this sense this stanza's last verse ("So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep"), read by Damrosch as a "casual but telling challenge to the reader" (2015, p. 64), can be seen as an instance of the irony associated with childhood in Simpson's British Romantic irony. The speaker's chain of thought in this stanza allows a reading in which an ironic social critique is made, however unwillingly this is made—the willingness or unwillingness not being the point in this aspect of British Romantic irony.

The speaker talks then about Tom Dacre, another chimney sweeper, who cried when his head was shaved. With an optimistic pragmatism, the speaker calms down little Tom: "Hush Tom never mind it, for when your head's bare, / You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair." Tom at that night slept and dreamt, the speaker says. His dream is symbolic of the happy apocalypse he wanted to happen. The children are locked in black coffins—symbolizing not only the chimneys, but also the children's bodies, not unlike "The Little Black Boy's" speaker's belief—which are opened by an angel with "a bright key."[63] The children are then free to "wash in a river and shine in the Sun"—expressing their desire of being able to get rid of their dirt and not to be confined in a closed space.

The fifth stanza is especially representative of these children's ideology: "And the Angel told Tom if he'd be a good boy, / He'd have God for his father and never want joy." The "want" does not represent a sort of asceticism, but instead have a meaning closer to "lack." One questions the possibility of having any joy in these children's difficult lives, but it seems that, for them, their lives are joyful enough. The two last verses also touch on these issues: "Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm. / So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm." Here, the speaker's "tho'" acquires an ironic poignancy because it is the only adversative connector used in the poem, and is simply employed to lament the weather, and not any of the children's difficulties. The last verse most bluntly states their ideology, which in this context acquires an almost scary tone.

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[63] Erdman cites the already mentioned protective legislation of 1788 as this "bright key" (2015, p. 132).

This poem is placed in “Innocence,” but the reader cannot but feel too much of Experience present in it. The children, including the speaker himself, are really the only Innocent aspect of the poem, and it is difficult not to ironically contrast their Innocence with the poem’s cruel aspects. Another of these aspects is shown in the design of the plate. Not so much in the drawings close to the bottom, where Tom Dacre’s dream is depicted: the angel is freeing the boys, with some of them running seemingly happily, some embracing. If the drawings are somewhat straightforward, it is the very “congested effect” of the plate which denotes Experience, with all the text accumulated on one page, as if to mimic the “claustrophobic chimneys” (DAMROSCH, 2015, p. 65).

In my analysis of “The Little Black Boy” I already found ironical contrasts within the poem itself when looking for the optimistic ideology of the speaker. With this poem, it is the contrast of this almost Experienced poem with its true opposite in “Experience.” One of the aspects that will be contrasted is the types of ideologies of both speakers, and how they can be seen as negative or not.

In the case of the second poem, the speaker is not a child, and is more akin to other speakers of “Experience,” such as “London.” In fact, this speaker only utters the first three verses of the poem. The rest is uttered by a chimney sweeper, one very different from the ones seen in the first poem. The speaker presents the chimney sweeper in a woeful tone: “A little black thing among the snow: / Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!” The chimney sweeper, accordingly, speaks of himself in self-pitying laments. This is an Experienced chimney sweeper, whose logic is startlingly bitter: it is “*Because* [he] was happy upon the heath” (my italics) that he became a chimney sweeper. His fate is then a sort of punishment for his happy behavior in infancy. Notice also how he parrots the speaker’s “notes of woe,” as if he is copying the speaker’s world view.

The last stanza is particularly aggressive. Its first verse (“And because I am happy. & dance & sing”) is linked by Erdman to “an ancient May Day custom,” “when London streets are given to the sweeps and milkmaids to perform for alms in grotesque symmetry” (2015, p. 275). In this day, the people were allowed to express their pity for the poor chimney sweepers, and to feel better about themselves, and “to praise God & his Priest & King” while doing nothing to change their conditions. The poem’s last verse (“Who make up a heaven of our misery”), revealing the sad irony of the situation, is specially to the point. Different from the first poem, this irony cannot be connected with British Romantic irony’s irony of the children.

This happens because this chimney sweeper is making a metacommentary here by critically engaging with his situation, unlike the first poem's speaker.

The design of this plate is connected in its mood with the speaker's attitude. The child is sadly looking at the raining or snowing sky, as if he is asking God what he has done to deserve such fate—not unlike the baby in "Infant Sorrow." The tone is bleak and melancholic, and the boy appears to be less aggressive than his last lines in the poem might suggest. The hypocrisy evidenced by the boy in the last stanza does not appear here. With this, the speaker's tone, instead of the child's, is what dominates, and with this an irony can be perceived. The boy is reified by the speaker ("A little black thing"), and becomes to him a sort of symbol of the world's hopelessness. This process prevents the speaker from hearing the words of the child as the denunciation that they are, and even to take any action to change it, so caught in Experience that he is.

Some reflection is possible when considering the way of thinking of both children, the speaker of the first poem and the one from the second poem. The speaker of the first poem has a way of thinking which resembles "The Little Black Boy:" his optimism is unbounded, and we as readers see that his way of thinking cannot be sustained for too long. In this sense, this child is bound to fall into a state of Experience which is perhaps akin to the one in which the child of the second poem is. This boy, with his too premature Experience, is already in an acute state of dejection.

If the reader can easily identify the boy from the first poem's way of thinking as ideology—in the sense of false consciousness—perhaps the second boy's way of thinking seems to be to the point, i.e. it is not an ideology. Gillham cites the first boy's way of concatenating his ideas (with usual recourse to "and") as always looking forward; the second boy, on the other hand, uses "because" more often, and is preoccupied with motives—perhaps the motives he is asking the sky about in the design (2009, p. 46). Notice, however, the boy's parroting of "the notes of woe." His argument seems to be too caught in Experience, with a resentment towards "God & his Priest & King" that may come more from a reception of other people's way of thinking, such as the speaker of the poem, than a way of thinking mostly based on actual experience.

And with this, the boy who is closest to the truth is actually the one who suffers the most. Being children (and being compared to lambs in the first poem), none of them are actually able to change their situations. If the one from the first poem is unfortunately caught

in an ideology which at some point will crumble, the second one is already in despair. And to what end? The people from whom he acquired his Experience possibly thought it would be useful for him to be aware of his harsh reality, or perhaps were too caught inside Experience to see the damage of their attitudes. But this boy does not have the means to change his situation, and his knowledge only becomes a bitter hopelessness.

For these children, the contrast only highlights the importance of Innocence. Innocence can be (and is) deceptive, but it is a needed stage in the children's lives. The boy from the second poem is all the more pitiable because of his premature fall into Experience, which will not necessarily mean a premature transcendence to the organized Innocence. The fault, then, is on us as readers. In this sense, the second poem's speaker can be seen as representative. The speaker's reifying pity, even though more akin to social protest, is nonetheless harmful. The speaker's Experience needs to be transcended, or at least needs to be put to good use in action, or else the child will grow to become himself the speaker. The pair of poems does not point any direction as how to do this, but it becomes clear in their contrast that something needs to be different.

The next pair of mirror poems continue in the theme of social critique. The two poems titled "Holy Thursday" deal with aspects connected to "The Chimney Sweeper." In fact, the second "The Chimney Sweeper's" last stanza can be seen as reflecting about events such as the already cited May Day, but also the Holy Thursday of this pair of poems. The first "Holy Thursday" shows the perspective of an Innocent speaker, but this time not a child. The speaker's perspective is one of seeing the good side of the event, or as Joseph Addison called earlier in the eighteenth century, a "spectacle pleasing both to God and man" (apud GLECKNER, 1956, p. 412). He is impressed by the orderliness and magnificence of the event: the children "with their innocent faces clean," the symmetry and the colorfulness of "The children walking two & two in red & blues & green," the "mighty wind" of their song.

Table 14 – The two “Holy Thursday”

(continues)

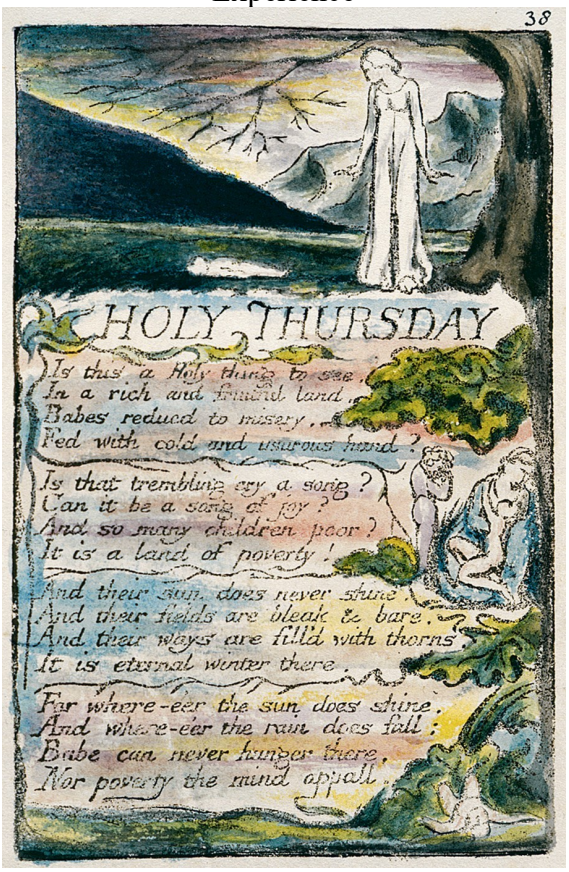
Figure 23: L 10 - “Holy Thursday” from “Innocence”	Figure 24: L 38 - “Holy Thursday” From “Experience”
	
Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).	Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).
Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean The children walking two & two in red & blue & green Grey headed beadles walkd before with wands as white as snow Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flower’s O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands	Is this a holy thing to see, In a rich and fruitful land, Babes reducd to misery, Fed with cold and usurous hand? Is that trembling cry a song? Can it be a song of joy? And so many children poor? It is a land of poverty! And their sun does never shine. And their fields are bleak & bare. And their ways are fill’d with thorns. It is eternal winter there.

Table 14 – The two “Holy Thursday”

(conclusion)

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door (BLAKE, 1988, p. 13)	For where-e’er the sun does shine, And where-e’er the rain does fall: Babe can never hunger there, Nor poverty the mind appall. (BLAKE, 1988, p. 19-20)

Source: Made by the author (2019).

Such orderliness can also be seen in the designs of the plate. In the upper part, boys are “walking two & two” from left to right, while girls do the same in the lower part, but going from right to left. In most colored versions, the children use colorful clothes, just as indicated in the poem. Preceding them are old men, one of them with a large wand, supposedly guiding the children. It is as if the old men are shepherds to “multitudes of lambs.”

The use of fourteeners, the only case in the whole of *Songs*, is also significant. The fourteeners, in rhymed couplets, bring to the poem a solemnity because of its association with older poetry, such as George Chapman’s translation of Homer’s *Iliad* (1598). It should be noticed that this metrical scheme was not common in the eighteenth century, and does not immediately bring with it the mocking attitude which Alexander Pope developed for the heroic couplets in *The Dunciad*, for instance.

Gillham makes an interpretation that is suited to what I have been calling an Innocent reading: the poem “takes the general poverty indicated by the numbers of charity school children for granted, it regards the efforts to offset the poverty as necessary and, because something is achieved regards them as well directed” (2009, p. 195-196). The speaker, then, according to Gillham, is not only optimistic, but pragmatic. If problems exist, and they do, moments such as those depicted in the poem need to be celebrated, because they bring some hope. In this sense, Gillham interprets the last verse (“Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door”) non-ironically, linking it with the speaker’s “sense of responsibility” (2009, p. 196). Yet, one cannot read the poem without finding it filled with a cloying sentimentality, and with ironic overtones. Perhaps this happens here because the speaker is one of the few in “Innocence” who seems somehow authoritative, and because of this his

overly optimistic perspective cannot but feel extremely naive. The second poem makes explicit these aspects, aggressively pointing out the errors of this speaker's attitude, making their contrasting reading revealing.

When both are contrasted, the economy and directness of the second poem becomes all the more evident. In the first stanza the main attack is directed at the hypocrisy of the situation: the babes "fed with cold and usurous hand" highlight such attitude. At the time, apologies for the usefulness of charity schools were made using rational—and inhuman—arguments. The children should be cared for so that they would not become criminals, and their education would bring a sense of conformity that would not let them have rebellious ideas, and so would "make excellent servants" (GILLHAM, 2009, p. 194). The "usurous hand" is not, then, making real charity, but making an investment. For the speaker of the second poem the children's song is not a "mighty wind," but resonates with trembling desperation. They are, after all, guided by the wands of the "grey headed beadles" of the first poem, and the aged men who "beneath them sit" are not guardians, but tyrants.

The last two stanzas of the second poem contrast the children's actual situation and the ideal situation that should be pursued. Their situation is "bleak & bare," "fill'd with thorns," and "it is eternal winter there." The utopia, then, would be a place of summer, where "the sun does shine" and "the rain does fall." The last verse ("Nor poverty the mind appall") suits the two definitions of the verb "to appall:" not only the mind is shocked, but it is also turned pale, as the designs will show.

Pallor is a crucial element in the designs of the plate. Although the scenery is mostly luscious, depicting the "rich and beautiful land" of the poem, the persons depicted are mostly too white, and scarily so. On the upper part of the plate, a woman looks at a white baby lying on the ground, probably dead. Just below in the right, a scene of melancholy is depicted, with a boy crying, and a girl hopelessly embracing a dejected woman. Their sadness is possibly because of the white body lying below. In most versions of this plate, these persons are dressed in light colors, and they look very pale, specially what seem to be the dead bodies lying on the ground.

Their paleness can be seen as an invective against the paleness present in the first poem. There, the children are clothed in bright colors, but the "grey headed beadles" are "as white as snow" (or possibly their wands, the poem is ambiguous here), and the "guardians of the poor" are "aged men," possibly also having grey or white head. Bloom links their

whiteness to a “death emblem” (1963, p. 44). This only becomes transparent with the contrast with the second poem, which creates an ironic tension: if the first speaker sees these old men as guardians and guiders, they become after the second poem symbols of oppression and death.

It should be noticed that in this pair of poems, more than in any other pair I already analyzed, there is not so much a dialectical irony, in the sense that the invective made by the second speaker against the hypocrisy of the first one can hardly be turned back on him. One can say that the second speaker is wholly negative, and his lack of pragmatism, or the lack any solution, is contrasted with the pragmatism of the first speaker. But the first speaker’s pragmatism is in service of such a cruel and harsh system that it cannot be accepted. In this sense, the “cold and usurous hand” is particularly effective. This is something that is not perceived by the first speaker, but needs to be perceived. It is not the second speaker’s aim to propose solutions, but instead, like a prophet of the Old Testament (and perhaps, in our times, someone like the young activist Greta Thunberg), to ironically (and boldly so) point at the hypocrisy and horrors of the situation.

4.4 “THE DIVINE IMAGE” AND “THE HUMAN ABSTRACT:” INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE IRONIZED

The last set of mirror poems I will analyze, “The Divine Image” and “The Human Abstract,” is the one which most clearly brings ideas and argumentation to the fore, instead of relying on characters or situations to expose such ideas. Such abstract quality may connect them with the first mirror poems analyzed, but their arguments also touch on social issues.

Both poems also seem for some to be arguments which are powerful in themselves. This has made Gillham argue that Blake himself is the speaker of “The Human Abstract,” even if he is “expounding a view that he holds in contempt” (2009, p. 62). Curiously, other interpreters, such as Bloom, do not perceive in “The Human Abstract” contempt, but instead a fierce and genuine attack on the Innocent vision depicted on “The Divine Image.” I do not share Gillham’s opinion about Blake being the speaker of either poem, and I will assign to each speaker their appropriate state, as if they are spokesmen of their own states.

Table 15 – “The Divine Image” and “The Human Abstract”

(continues)

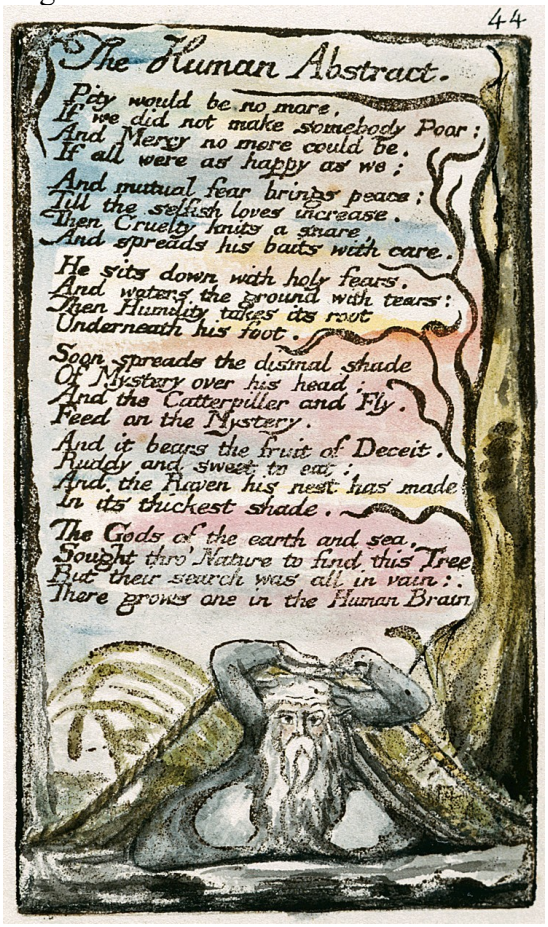
Figure 25: L 27 - “The Divine Image”	Figure 26: L 44 - “The Human Abstract”
	
Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).	Source: The William Blake Archive (2019).
To Mercy Pity Peace and Love, All pray in their distress: And to these virtues of delight Return their thankfulness. For Mercy Pity Peace and Love, Is God our father dear: And Mercy Pity Peace and Love, Is Man his child and care. For Mercy has a human heart Pity, a human face: And Love, the human form divine, And Peace, the human dress. Then every man of every clime, That prays in his distress, Prays to the human form divine Love Mercy Pity Peace.	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; And mutual fear brings peace; Till the selfish loves increase. Then Cruelty knits a snare, And spreads his baits with care. He sits down with holy fears, And waters the ground with tears: Then Humility takes its root Underneath his foot. Soon spreads the dismal shade Of Mystery over his head; And the Catterpiller and Fly, Feed on the Mystery.

Table 15 – “The Divine Image” and “The Human Abstract”

(conclusion)

And all must love the human form, In heathen, turk or jew. Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell, There God is dwelling too (BLAKE, 1988, p. 12-13)	And it bears the fruit of Deceit, Ruddy and sweet to eat; And the Raven his nest has made In its thickest shade. The Gods of the earth and sea, Sought thro’ Nature to find this Tree But their search was all in vain: There grows one in the Human Brain (BLAKE, 1988, p. 27)

Source: Made by the author (2019).

“The Divine Image” starts by enumerating what the speaker calls “virtues of delight:” those are “Mercy Pity Peace and Love.” These virtues have a two-way path: one prays for them “in their distress,” and “return their thankfulness” when are contented. In the second stanza, the virtues are identified with God and with Man. With this, the indirect identification between God and Man is made.

In the third stanza, each virtue receives a visual representation, creating not so much a unified whole, but what Bloom calls a “monster of abstractions” (1963, p. 41). Indeed, it is difficult to picture Mercy’s human heart, Pity’s human face, Love’s human form divine, or Peace’s human dress. What is relevant is that all of them are human, and not a higher power or a Platonic idea. Love, “the human form divine,” is for the speaker the most important, the only one to be cited alone: “Prays to the human form divine / Love Mercy Pity Peace,” covering then all the other virtues.

The connection with prayer is relevant, as it appears throughout the poem. The four virtues are not only ideals to be pursued, but instead something to pray for. With this, there is a logic that is individual, that of those who pray while struggling with their distress, but touching on virtues that are collective. The four virtues may be apprehended as egotistical, such as self-love and self-pity, but in the poem they seem to be mainly directed at others—either the subject receiving from others, or the subject doing unto others.

The relation of the virtues with prayer is identified by the speaker as a principle pursued by all mankind, including people of different religions like “heathen, turk or jew.” This may be identified with a single god, but not necessarily so, as the mention of “heathen” makes clear. In fact, the speaker does not go into deep theological thinking, but relates these

human and universal virtues to a seed of religion. The last two verses of the poem are exemplary of this: “Where Mercy. Love & Pity dwell / There God is dwelling too.” The virtues, as the first to be cited, occupy a sort of primacy in relation to religion.

The designs of the plate are difficult to be integrated with the scene. What does the flame-like vegetation symbolize, the reader may ask? It may symbolize the four virtues considered together, since all of the persons depicted in the plate are attached or supported by it. The persons are divided in four groups, three groups with two persons and one with a lonely woman, in the lower part of the plate. Possibly each group represents a virtue, but it is difficult to point which virtue is represented by which group. And which virtue does the lonely woman represent? These are questions which I will not answer, because I believe the very impossibility of identifying them is relevant, as if the virtues merge with each other as they do in the poem. The flame-like vegetation is what is most prominent though, meandering through the text of the poem, filling empty spaces in the plate as if trying to occupy it all, signaling what is here the virtues’ omnipresence.

If “The Divine Image” shows the four virtues as a seed of religion, “The Human Abstract,” through its own mode of thinking, shows how the seed develops into religion. But, before doing this, the speaker is fierce in his response to “The Divine Image.”[64] The tone is resentful, and his points are clear. The first two verses (“Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody Poor”) attack the virtue of Pity, showing its hypocrisy, and what the speaker perceives as the need of injustice to exist for Pity also to exist. The next verses (“And Mercy no more could be. / If all were as happy as we”) attack Mercy in the same vein. The attacks are similar to the ones made in the second “Holy Thursday.” There, however, is a situation, patently hypocritical, that is depicted. Here, the argument and ideas are completely abstract, making the argument general.

The first verse of the next stanza (“And mutual fear brings peace”) treats Peace as a sort of cold war (GLECKNER, 1961, p. 378). This virtue, “the human dress,” is questioned, and is possible to wonder which dress is this: is it European, African, or Asiatic? A Peace with English clothes for instance, a sort of *Pax Brittanica* which was soon to enfold, cannot but be seen as a bitter irony if other peoples are considered.

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[64] Gleckner, in his essay “William Blake and the Human Abstract,” shows how this poem came to be, relying on earlier versions Blake wrote in his notebook (1961). Earlier versions were much closer to “The Divine Image” in form—one of them was titled “A Divine Image,” making the connection more explicit. In my analysis, though, I am considering only “The Human Abstract,” the one which became a part of “Experience.”

Having touched on three of the virtues, the speaker proceeds to tackle that which is probably the thorniest one: Love. In fact, the speaker does not mention Love by itself, but instead mentions “selfish loves.” He cannot conceive of any form of uninterested love. Gillham links this emphasis on self-interest with developments in eighteenth century philosophy, in what he calls a “debased form of Hobbesian thought” (2009, p. 60). He cites Bolingbroke, an eighteenth-century English philosopher, as turning Hobbes’s theory of man into dogma, possessing a “propagandist’s interest” in making his theory widely available (2009, p. 61). This world view was current in Blake’s time, and in this sense the speaker of “The Human Abstract” seems to follow it.

From this point (second stanza’s second verse) on, the speaker explains how this selfish love turns into cruelty, fear, and how religion is created. Ferber notices how the word “holy” usually bears a negative bias in Blake’s works, as in third stanza’s first verse (“He sits down with holy fears”), not unlike the verse “Is this a holy thing to see” of the second “Holy Thursday” (1991, p. 35). The “holy fears” can be seen as a perception of the guilt caused by the earlier Cruelty, which becomes “Humility” in the speaker’s terms. Like the “holy fears,” the speaker treats Humility not as a positive virtue, but instead sees it as a sort of self-debasement which is in itself negative.

In the fourth stanza, holy fears and Humility make Mystery appear. Mystery feeds “Caterpiller and Fly” according to the speaker, hinting at its parasitic nature and its negative aspect. Mystery is a sort of rationalization created to deal with guilt and self-debasement, which were up to that point a cause of distress. In this sense, Mystery is quite attractive, bearing “the fruit of Deceit / Ruddy and sweet to eat.” This Deceit is attractive because it ignores the beginning of all of the path explained in the poem which stemmed from the increase of “selfish loves.”

Third and fourth verses of the fifth stanza (“And the Raven his nest has made / In its thickest shade”) brings a reference to Yggdrasil, the tree of Nordic mythology (FRYE, 1974, p. 136). In the Nordic myth, the Raven appears when Odin hangs himself upon Yggdrasil in order to gain knowledge (BLOOM, 1963, p. 143). This connects the tree and the fruit with self-slaughter, not only hinting at the violence connected with Mystery, but also at the slaughter of one’s past, as “the fruit of Deceit” hides the past problems spawning from selfishness and cruelty that led to it.

The deceit perpetrated by the Mystery is so complete that even "The gods of the earth and sea / Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree." Mystery is reified in a tree, but not actually so: it is perceived by everyone, even the gods, as so, even though its actuality is only in the "Human Brain." The speaker's choice of word, "Brain" instead of "Mind," is relevant, as the first one exists physically, and is not an abstraction like the second. The tree, thought by "gods and earth and sea" to exist in the physical world (the Nature of the poem), ironically only exists inside the physical Brain, but as an abstraction.

The design shows an old bearded man crouching, as if afraid, covering himself with a mantle. He is the man with "holy fears" of the third stanza. The mantle is the "dismal shade" of Mystery. The mantle seems as if it is being created by the old man, the ropes around him possibly being braids of his own hair. But again, maybe it is really a mantle. This undecidability is not unlike how Mystery in the poem grows into a tree and is perceived as existing, even though only it exists in the "Human Brain." The rationalization that is Mystery is so deceitful that even in the design it is hard to decide if it is being created by the old man or else is something which he uses to protect himself.

Even if "The Human Abstract" ironizes, especially in the two first stanzas, the virtues of "The Divine Image," the speaker of the second poem does not touch on Love. Instead, only self-love is mentioned, which is the first cause in the speaker's chain of argument. Love for others does not exist for him. The two poems' argumentations are correct when their presupposition is admitted, and perhaps "The Human Abstract" seems more convincing because its doubting attitude is more akin to our contemporary system of beliefs. Frye convincingly states the difference of perception of each poem: "The universal perception of the particular is the 'divine image' of the *Songs of Innocence*; the egocentric perception of the general is the 'human abstract' of the *Songs of Experience*" (1974, p. 32). "The Human Abstract" is indeed too narcissistic and generalizing, and when contrasted with "The Divine Image" in this sense some ironies become clearer.

The fourth verse of the poem ("If all were as happy as we") is read then as a resentful irony. Who is the "we" the speaker refers to? He does not seem to be happy at all, but instead seems to be himself a victim of his own world view. The speaker seems proud of having understood the mechanisms through which the tree of Mystery comes to be. However, if the possibility of the kind of Love depicted in "The Divine Image" exists, the speaker's logic is false. His own argument offers no way out, and can be seen itself as a Mystery. The speaker is

probably contented with his own argument, not seeing that he himself has also eaten “the fruit of Deceit.” With this, the design of the plate can be seen as depicting the speaker himself: ironically, he is falling into the same kind of trap that he is explaining in the poem.

This is not to say that “The Divine Image” is necessarily less wrong. Contrary to “The Human Abstract,” this poem does not consider the existence of self-interest (at least in the sense that it can surmount the four virtues of the poem). People “pray in their distress” to the four virtues, indeed, but they also reciprocate by “return[ing] their thankfulness.” Evidently, the speaker of “The Divine Image” is too naive, representing an ideal state of Innocence.

What is left with the contrast of both poems are antithetical poles: that of the nonexistence of self-interest (or at least its unimportance when confronted with the virtues of “Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love”) and that of the complete reign of self-interest. If the first pole is rapidly perceived as naive and faulty, the contrast shows that the second pole also has its own traps. Mystery and its fruit can entrap either side, and a dialectical solution somewhere in the middle is perhaps the best we can arrive at. The caution against the fruit of Deceit always needs to be there, however.

5 FINAL REMARKS

With both kinds of analyses developed in the last two chapters concluded, I believe that the process I pursued in them was productive, bringing several elements to the interpretations which are not usually pursued by commentators of Blake's works. In this sense, I believe my analysis of "The Ecchoing Green" is exemplary: this poem is usually quickly analyzed,[65] and some degree of gloom is attributed to it because of the change from "Ecchoing Green" to the "darkening Green" of the last verse, but not much else is said. It seems that most commentators are prone to admitting aspects of Experience in "Innocence," but few of them actually search for these aspects with the ironic verve I did in chapter 3.

Even the famous pair of "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" lent itself to some new reflection, especially when considering the graphic elements *vis-à-vis* the text of the poems. If the contrast of the tiger of the text and the tiger of the plate has been perceived by most readers of "The Tyger," the way in which the contrast worked has usually not been thoroughly explained, and I believe the process of analysis of chapter 4 was crucial for arriving at a valuable reading of this contrast. As can be seen, in both examples just cited, but also in others, the graphic elements of the plates were vital aspects for building the interpretation, creating a richer reading than a textual-only analysis could provide.

Unfortunately, mainly for reasons of space, not all of the poems from "Innocence" that do not have a pair in "Experience" were analyzed. In the case of the mirror poems, two pairs (the one including the four poems of little boys and girls, lost and found, along with both "Nurse's Song") were left out. Even considering that the poems chosen for analysis are representative of the book, I am confident that using the same process for the other poems would also prove revealing.

I would like to consider now how both types of Romantic irony discussed in chapter 2 (Schlegel's Romantic irony and Simpson's British Romantic irony) appear in the analyses made in chapters 3 and 4. If we consider how British Romantic irony appears in my analyses, a reflection can be made regarding its three aspects presented in chapter 2. Only two of British Romantic irony's three aspects appeared prominently: its relation of irony and childhood, along with the tone of the poems. The aspect of irony and childhood appeared, as expected, in poems where a child is the speaker, such as "The Little Black Boy."

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[65] Bloom (1963, p. 40-41), for instance, devotes only two paragraphs to this poem.

The aspect of tone is more easily put to work, and I did so in several poems, bringing indeed a plurality of meanings which makes the choice between one and several others difficult, if not impossible. Such is its importance in British Romantic poetry, as Simpson argues. This is not far from Erdman's assertion:

> There are layers of innuendo [in the *Songs*] that reveal themselves only under careful and repeated examination, and the degree of tension between the surface meaning and the satiric implications depends much on the intellectual distance between the singer and the real author, Blake. (ERDMAN, 2015, 118)

Note, however, how Erdman puts the ultimate authority on Blake, something that Simpson does not, as this passage suggests: "This atmosphere of ambivalence and potential discomfort, involving as it does the intrusion of indeterminate 'tones of voice' which upset the apparent precision of the written word, is evident right from the beginning of *Songs of Innocence*" (SIMPSON, 1979, p. 86). Simpson's point here, after the analyses of the last two chapters, sounds valid.

The other aspect of British Romantic irony, that of syntactic tensions, appeared only once, in the second "Introduction." I believe this is so because the poems of *Songs* are formally simple, and do not usually use complex words or syntax. This is especially the case with "Innocence," but it is also a tendency in "Experience." Simpson uses instances of Blake's poems to illustrate his points, but he only uses Blake's longer, narrative poems, which are arguably more complex syntactically, and more suited to evoke this aspect (SIMPSON, 1979).

To conclude, I want to focus on the connection between *Songs* and Schlegel's Romantic irony. As I mentioned in the second chapter, Romantic irony does not work as a tool for close reading, and instead looks at the text as a whole. It seems apt, then, to make such considerations here. I believe that through the kind of readings I have done in both chapters, a similarity emerges between my proceedings and Schlegel's three steps for the action of creation to occur. My readings from both chapters go from a naive and enthusiastic perspective—either that of the Innocent reading, or that presented in the poem from "Innocence" when analyzing the mirror poems—to a critical revaluation of such attitude—either that of the Experienced reading, or that presented in the poem from "Experience" when analyzing the mirror poems. Such movement is strikingly similar to Schlegel's movement of self-creation and self-annihilation. The similarity between self-restriction and the synthetic interpretation I developed at the end of each analysis is accordingly perceptible.

I need to emphasize that Schlegel is concerned only with the writing process. A complication appears for this thesis's case, because Blake's poems work with both text and image, each being essential parts, and should be considered together when dealing with the three steps. I believe, however, that this link is still valid, since the artistic process, both the writing and the drawing/etching/engraving, can be considered together.

I also need to emphasize that Schlegel, different from me, is looking through the perspective of the author. Self-creation, self-annihilation, and self-restriction are steps in the author's creative process. My proceeding, on the other hand, is closer to Simpson's, in the sense that the authority of the author is, if not questioned, at least not relevant. An instance of this occurs in my analysis of "The Little Black Boy," where in my reading I ironize Blake's colonizing attitude. This is not to say that Schlegel's three steps cannot be applied to a vision of Blake's creative process; I do not, however, want to enter the realm of intention and genetic criticism.[66] Nevertheless, I argue that the process occurring in my reading is similar to Schlegel's three steps, but, whereas Schlegel puts the authority and centrality of his analysis on the author, I put it instead on the reader. Reading being itself a creative endeavor, it seems pertinent that both mine and Schlegel's process tackle a process of creation.

I believe this process goes in tandem with a passage in Schlegel's "On Incomprehensibility." In this essay, Schlegel comments that a reader will find his brother A. W. Schlegel's *Elegies* "almost too simple and transparent," and then explains: "a classical text must never be entirely comprehensible. But those who are cultivated and who cultivate themselves must always want to learn more from it" (SCHLEGEL, 1971, p. 269). The ones who cultivate themselves, the readers, are then able to perceive (or to create) in such apparently "simple and transparent" texts—and I believe *Songs*, especially "Innocence," can be put in this category—a degree of incomprehensibility, or of Romantic irony itself.

[66] A study which thinks about the three steps in relation to how Blake deals with the process of writing and drawing/etching/engraving would be especially interesting.

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