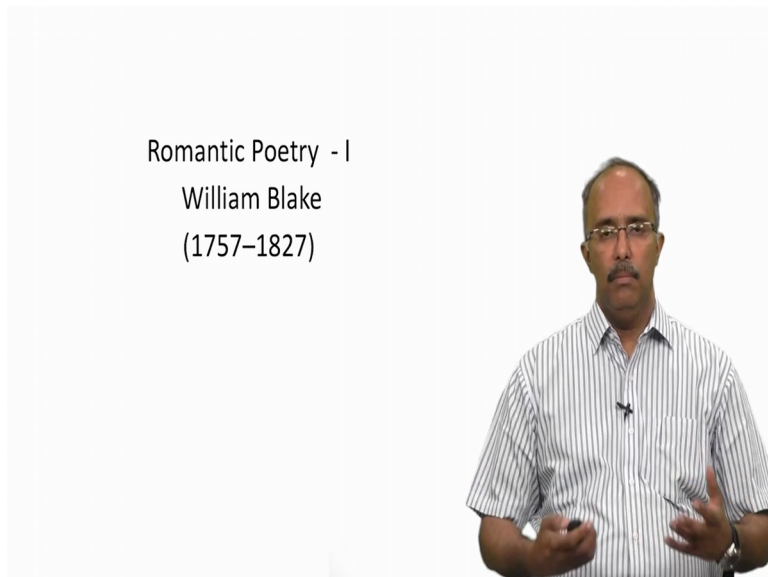


English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832
Professor Pramod K Nayar
Department of English
University of Hyderabad
Romantic Poetry 1: William Blake (1757-1827)

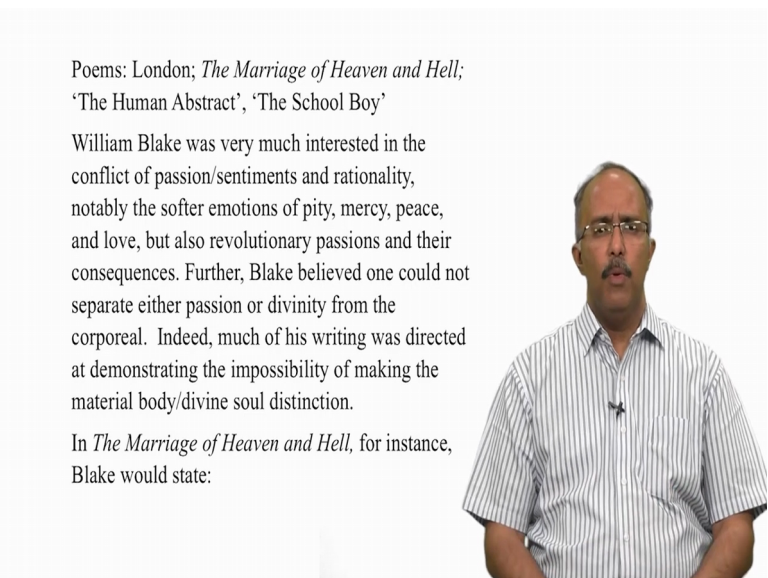
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Poems: London; *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; 'The Human Abstract', 'The School Boy'

William Blake was very much interested in the conflict of passion/sentiments and rationality, notably the softer emotions of pity, mercy, peace, and love, but also revolutionary passions and their consequences. Further, Blake believed one could not separate either passion or divinity from the corporeal. Indeed, much of his writing was directed at demonstrating the impossibility of making the material body/divine soul distinction.

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, for instance, Blake would state:



Hello everybody, we have been looking at Wordsworth, Coleridge as part of the big major poet of the romantic period. We will now look at a figure whose work begins much before the official romantic period but in many ways is a precursor to the romantics, William Blake (1757 to 1827) and arguably the greatest English poet since John Milton. We will be looking at some of his more famous poems London, the human abstract, the schoolboy, the marriage


of Heaven and hell. William Blake like Coleridge and Wordsworth was very much interested in the conflict or tension between passion and rationality.

And his work has almost always been an attempt to discover softer emotions of pity, and mercy and peace, but also revolutionary passions and their consequences. Blake believed one could not separate passion or divinity from the corporeal. So the assumption that there is an order form of passion and divine as distinct from the corporeal, something Blake has rejected outright. Indeed much of his writing therefore was directed at demonstrating that there is no material body divine or soul distinction.

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All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors.


1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, called 'Evil' is alone from the Body, & that Reason, called 'Good' is alone from the Soul.



But the following Contraries to these are True

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age
2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body, and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy

Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*



In the marriage of Heaven and hell for instance, Blake would write this coming up on your slide now. All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following errors. 1 man has

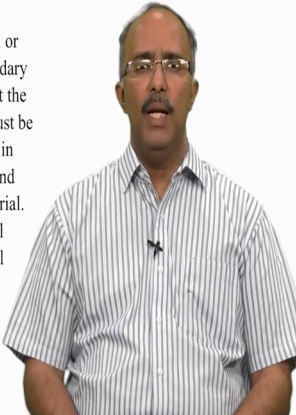
2 real existing principles namely a body and a soul. That energy called evil is alone from the body and that reason called good is alone from the soul. But the following contraries through these are true. 1, man is now body distinct from his soul from that call body is a portion of sole discerned by the five senses and later 2nd point, energy is the only life and is from the body and reason is the bound or outward circumference of energy.

(Refer Slide Time: 2:32)

Elsewhere, Blake would state:

The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination.
God himself that is [Yeshua] Jesus we are his Members
The Divine Body


According to Matthew JA Green, Blake's work embodies a 'visionary materialism', wherein 'The grounding of knowledge in a mode of experience derived through the body, conceived alternately as spiritual or material'. Blake rejects the idea that the body and the senses are secondary to the soul or the divine, in other words. Thus, Blake is moving against the mind-body dualism here, to prove that anything we identify as soul must be embedded in the material body. Blake as a precursor to the Romantics in this stance, is clearly rebelling against the empiricism of John Locke and others, by giving primacy to imagination, vision, passion and the material. In his famous 'The Tyger', therefore, the questioner envisions a fearful Framer; the reader's eye focuses on what the poetry is framing. Fearful symmetry may inhere in the fabulous tyger, or it may be imagination.



What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

And concludes with:

What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



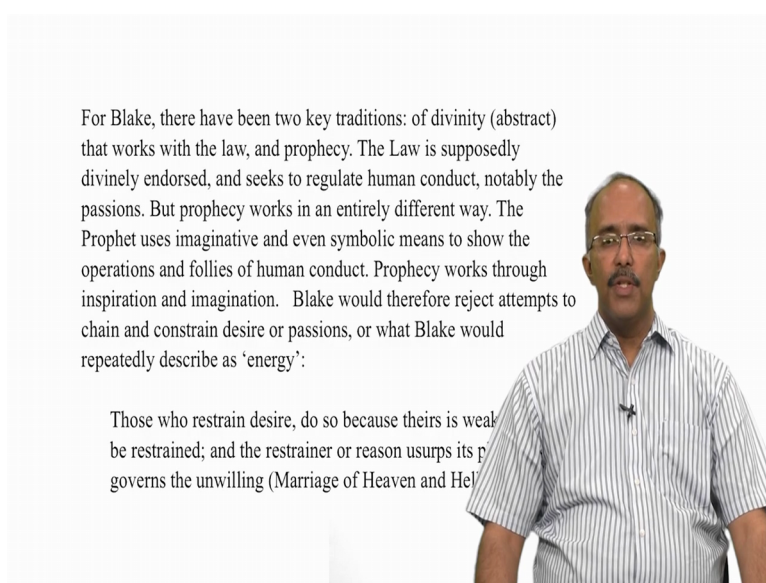
For Blake therefore the energy, the soul are rooted in the body itself. There is no such thing as a separate entity called a soul which you can mark out as separate from the body. According to Matthew Green, Blake's work embodies a visionary materialism. Wherein I quote from Green's work, bibliographic referencing is available at the end of this particular session, for those of you who want to explore this further. I quote Green. The grounding of

knowledge in a mode of experience derived to the body conceived alternately as spiritual or material.

That is the grounding of knowledge is experienced derived through our corporeal form and it is not something separate from it. Blake rejects the idea that the body at the senses are secondary to the soul or the divine. He is moving against the mindbody dualism, famously inaugurated by René Descartes to prove that anything we identify as soul must be embedded in the material body, in the material world. Which is why Matthew Green refers to as visionary materialism. You cannot think in terms of something as sophisticated as the soul unless you have it rooted in the body.

Blake here is a precursor to the romantics in this particular stance, clearly rebelling against empiricism of John Locke and others. In his poem *The Tyger*, the questioner and visions are fearful framer, the reader's eye focuses on what the Poetries Framing. Fearful symmetry may in here in the fabulous Tyger or it may in here in the imagination. Here is Blake's famous rhymes. What immortal hand or eye can frame thy fearful symmetry. And he concludes with the same question, but with one variation, What immortal hand or eye dare frame thy fearful symmetry.

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For Blake, there have been two key traditions: of divinity (abstract) that works with the law, and prophecy. The Law is supposedly divinely endorsed, and seeks to regulate human conduct, notably the passions. But prophecy works in an entirely different way. The Prophet uses imaginative and even symbolic means to show the operations and follies of human conduct. Prophecy works through inspiration and imagination. Blake would therefore reject attempts to chain and constrain desire or passions, or what Blake would repeatedly describe as 'energy':

Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak
be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its p
governs the unwilling (Marriage of Heaven and Hell)

This emphasis on imagination is recurrent throughout Blake's work. In *Auguries of Innocence*, Blake would formulate it for the entire Romantic Age:



To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.
Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence'



For Blake, there have been 2 key traditions of divinity which is abstract that works with the law and prophecy. The Law with a capital L is supposedly divinely endorsed and seeks to regulate human conduct, notably passions. But prophecy works on Intel indifferent way. The Prophet use this imaginative and even symbolic means to show the operations and follies of human conduct. Blake rejects attempts to limit desire or passion or what he would repeated describe as energy. This emphasis on imagination, passion and energy is recurrent throughout Blakes work.

In *Auguries of Innocence*, Blake would formulate what can be only thought of as a manifesto for the entire romantic age. Here is Blake's opening lines of *Auguries of Innocence*, much quoted, much quarrelled over but in many ways a manifesto for what the romantics will set out to do eventually. To see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wildflower, hold

infinity the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour. What is Blake doing here? Blake could make it clearer in the letter from which I shall now quote to illuminate what I have just said.

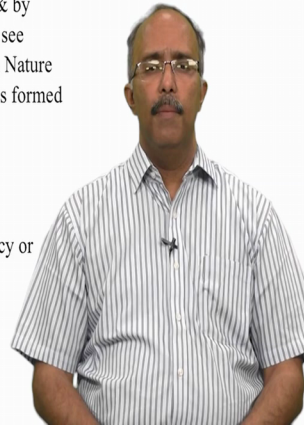
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In one of his letters, Blake would make this clearer:

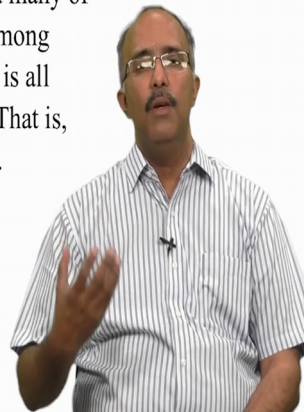
I know that This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision[.] I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike So me See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity & by these I shall not regulate my proportions, & Some Scarce see Nature at all[.] But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers

And in *Laocoon*:

To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination.



For Blake art is important because it transforms a viewer/reader's mental state. It should be noted here that Blake was an engraver and illustrated many of his own texts, and Thomas Gray, Dante among others. In Blake's view, the artistic vision is all powerful, and equated with the spiritual. That is, artistic vision is both aesthetic and divine.



The question of regulation, constraints and the 'Law', which may be read as both religious and juridical laws, appears famously in Blake's 'London' in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*:



This is Blake, I know that this world is a world of imagination and vision. I see everything I paint in this world, but everybody does not see alike. So, therefore he has already said that we are not all the same. To the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself, notice what he is saying. As a man is, so he sees, as the eyes are formed, such as its powers. In the Laocoon he would say, to me this world is all one tinted vision of fancy or imagination. Imagination is important, then what does Blake has to say about art? For Blake, Art is important because it transforms the reader's mental condition.

It changes the way we see the world, it should be noted here that Blake was an engraver and illustrated many of his own texts. As well as those of Dante, Thomas Gray Rather. In Blake's view the artistic vision is very powerful and he quits it with a spiritual, that it possesses both the aesthetic and divine components. And therefore you should not think in terms of curbing passion or emotion. The question of regulation, constraints and the law, which may be led as both religious and juridical laws, appears famously in Blake's London, a poem from songs of innocence and experience.

(Refer Slide Time: 6:44)

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

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every black'ning Church appalls;
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most, thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

- Blake. 'London'

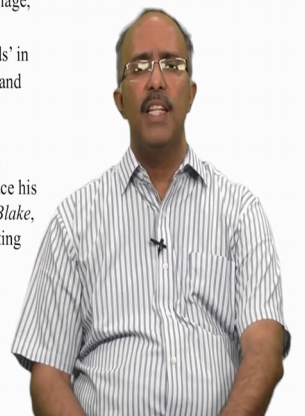


Blake's illustration for his poem 'London'



The loss of freedoms, including the freedom of spaces, is Blake's theme. These freedoms are taken away by institutions. The soldier who sacrifices his limbs and his body for the state, the boy who performs slave labour, and the harlot who provides services to the men, are all, finally abandoned in the city. The three principal institutions that Blake targets are marriage, monarchy and the church/religion. Blake would repeat this image of manacles and chains elsewhere: 'chains [...] of weak and tame minds' in *The Marriage* (16; E40), the 'mental chains' in *America* (13.3; E56) and the 'chains of the mind' in *Urizen*.

Blake's radicalism and location within a tradition of dissent has been extensively studied (see, for instance, a comprehensive attempt to trace his multiple locations in Steve Clark and David Worrall's *Historicizing Blake*, 1994). As the introduction to the volume notes, Blake was appropriating and responding to multiple traditions



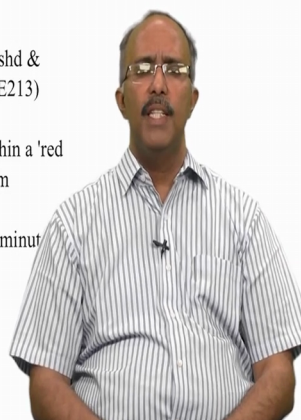
I wander through a chartered street, near the chartered frames does flow, and mark in every face I meet, marks of weakness, marks of woe. And then the cry of man, the chimney sweeper, the soldier and the prostitutes. Coming up on your slides next is Blake's own illustration of London, all right. And I think you should pay some attention to the old man tottering along being led somewhere. What is Blake's London doing? The loss of freedoms including the feet of space is Blake's theme. These freedoms are taken away by institutions, that is why the emphasis on the word chartered.

Chartered as in organized for business, approved for business. The soldier who sacrifices his limbs and his body for the state, the boy who perform slave labour and the harlot who provide services to the men are all finally abandoned. That is the soldier who worked for the country, for the nation, the boy who does slave labour and the prostitute who provides essential services to the men are finally all abandoned, not the working classes. And note also the 3 principal institutions that Blake targets Marriage, monarchy and church or religion.

Blake would repeat the image of manacles and chains elsewhere. Chains of weak and tamed minds is how he would describe it in the marriage of Heaven and hell, mental chains in America. What he is speaking about here is the loss of freedom, the loss of spatial and other forms of freedom. Blake's radicalism and location within the tradition of dissent has been extensively studied. And he was appropriating multiple editions here.

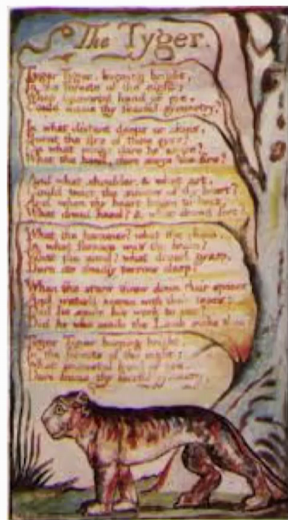
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Blake's protestations of 'Contempt & Abhorrence' (E660) have been taken at face value far too readily. The dinner-party in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* with 'the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel' (MHH 12, E38) is adapted from Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique*; the tirades in *jerusalem*, 'O Woman-born/ And Woman-nourishd & Woman-educated & Woman-scornd!' (*Jerusalem* 64: 16-17 E213) from Rousseau's *Emile*; and the 'visionary' spaces to be found within a 'red Globule of Mans Blood' in *Milton* (29 [31]:19-23 E127) from Locke's comments on the 'wonders' in the 'Figure and Motion of the minute Particles in the Blood.'



Blake's emphasis on energy and dynamism ensured that his representations of Nature were very different from that of, say Wordsworth. Blake preferred to see energy in Nature, and therefore his representations were not at pastoral. For example, 'The Sick Rose' and 'The Tyger' were more akin to sublime nature (we shall examine the sublime in Romantic in a later session) than to the placid pastoralism of Wordsworth.

Slide 6



Blake, The Tyger



Blake's protestation of contempt and abhorrence have been taken at face value a little too readily. The dinner party in the marriage of Heaven and hell, with the Prophet Isaiah and Ezekiel's is adapted from Voltaire's actually and his Dictionnaire Philosophique. So as you can see, you can trace many of the influence us in Blake. The emphasis on energy and dynamism ensure that his presentation of nature was very different from that of Say Wordsworth. Wordsworth nature was calm, pleasing, quiet, Blake's nature is energetic, furious, dynamic. There is always something not quite Pastoral about what he will do.

We have just looked that his famous Tyger where the energy of the Tyger is something which we cannot comprehend. And hence the question, do you dare create with Tyger, is also a question directed at us, do you dare see a Tyger. Poems like the sick Rose and the Tyger are more akin to sublime nature, not quite the Pastoral of Wordsworth. And here you can see

coming up on your slide, the drawing of the Tyger which liked it and of course the poem itself.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:27)

Divinity and goodness, like mercy and evil are all within the human. In one of his famous poems, 'The Human Abstract', Blake writes:

Slide 7-8



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;

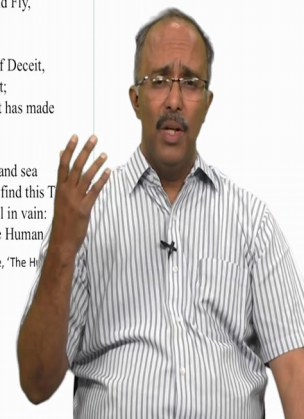
And mutual fear brings peace;
Till the selfish loves increase.
Then Cruelty knits a snare,
And spreads his baits with care.

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 Caterpillar and Fly,
Feed on the Mystery.

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 T
But their search was all in vain:
There grows one in the Human
Blake, 'The H





Blake, illustration, 'The Human Abstract'




Let us turn to another major leak theme. Blake argued that divinity and godness are not abstract, they exist within us, within the humans themselves. So, you cannot say that mercy, evil, goodness are all elsewhere, they are in us and it connects if you recall to what we have already said, all of this is rooted in the human. There is no such thing as a sole which is distinct from the corporeal. In one of his famous poems, the human abstract, Blake would write this. Coming up on your next few slides. Pity would be no more if you did not make somebody poor. And mercy no more could be if all were happy as we.

That is what he is saying, you cannot think of showing pretty mercy, until you have made somebody poor. So you have to keep somebody at that level to help them. We will look for these elsewhere but no, you do not have to look anywhere, it is all within us and here is your illustration of the human abstract, coming up on your next slide with the poem written on it.

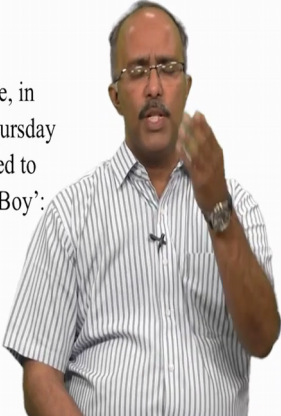
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Critics have observed that the illustration is deeply ambiguous: is the old man tying himself up or trying to free himself from the ropes? This extends the old Blake theme of limited movement and restrictions. The poem proposes that all that we claim about the goodness of mankind – mercy, pity, compassion – depend on keeping somebody poor and in suffering. Our human values therefore are founded on hypocrisy and social inequalities. Even when we plant a tree with Humility as its root, Mystery is its foliage/leaves. The fruit is of deceit, nothing more, and the raven, a symbol of death is associated with this tree. Thus Blake demolishes the idea of the innate goodness of mankind by pointing to the social injustices humanity creates, first, in order to show humanitarian work.



Physical suffering is a constant theme in Blake, in the famous chimney sweeper poems, Holy Thursday and others. Even school children are subjected to endless restraints notes Blake in 'The School Boy':

Slide



Critics have described that the illicit and which was on your slide just before this, the human abstract, that the illustration is very ambiguous. Is the old man tying himself up or is he trying to free himself from the ropes? This extends actually the old Blake theme of limited movement of restrictions which we have seen in London. The poem proposes that all that we claim about the goodness of mankind is actually quite hypocritical, because it is founded on social inequalities, that is Blake's radicalism.


So even when we plant a tree with humility as its roots, mystery is its foliage and leaves. The fruit is of deceit, nothing more. And the Raven, symbol of death as we know from much later rose, (())(11:06) poem is associated with this tree. Blake demolishes the idea of innate goodness of mankind by pointing to the social justices which we create, in order to show

humanitarian work. Let us go back to the point he made. Pity would be no more if you did not make somebody poor. Mercy no more could be if all were happy as we, and you cannot show mercy and humanitarianism towards people if they are as equal to, or they are required to us.

But the key point is the social justices, injustices that we create, that necessitates having to show mercy. Physical suffering is a constant theme in Blake, the Holy Thursday poem, the chimney sweeper poems and all of that. Blake's Schoolboy which is now up on your side here, asks question about this kind of cruel life that people are forced into lead.

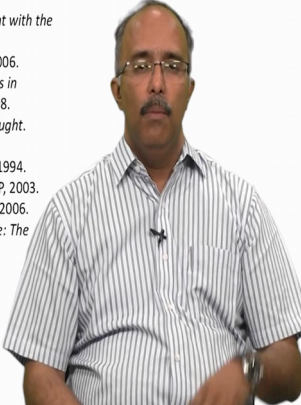
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I love to rise in a summer morn,
But to go to school in a summer morn,
O! it drives all joy away;
Under a cruel eye outworn,
The little ones spend the day,
In sighing and dismay.
How can the bird that is born for joy,
Sit in a cage and sing.
How can a child when fears annoy,
But droop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful spring.
Blake, 'The School Boy'



Additional/Recommended Reading

Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought*. Clarendon, 1970
David Ward, *Coleridge and the Nature of Imagination: Evolution, Engagement with the World, and Poetry*. Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013.
Lucy Newlyn (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
Kerry McSweeney, *The Language of the Senses: Sensory-Perceptual Dynamics in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson*. Liverpool UP, 1998.
David Vallins, *Coleridge and the Psychology of Romanticism: Feeling and Thought*. Macmillan, 2000.
Steve Clark and David Worrall (eds) *Historicizing Blake*. Palgrave-Macmillan 1994.
Morris Eaves (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Stephen Gill (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
Matthew JA Green, *Visionary Materialism in the Early Works of William Blake: The Intersection of Enthusiasm and Empiricism*. Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005.



I love to rise in the summer morn Murbad to go to school in a summer morn, oh it drives all joy away. Under a cruel eye outworn the little ones spend the day in sighing and dismay. How

can the bird that is born for Joystick in a cage and sing. How can a child when fears annoy droop but droop sustained Irving and forget his youthful spring. Blake would actually say that schools like military regimes are actually limited since being placed on the imagination of the child. Holy Thursday, the schoolboy, the chimney sweeper poems all situated a boy, the child as being obstructed in whatever they want to do because of constraints of education, religion and the family. That was William Blake.

Blake's contribution has been to provide a different view of nature, but also to call the bluff on the questions of divinity and the idea of the soul. When he says all of this is rooted in the human, you cannot say that there is something divine out there. The Divine is within us, you cannot show mercy, unless it is within you. So, the visionary but realism that the critics spoke about like Coleridge and Matthew Green is central to our understanding of Blake. Blake's romanticism does anticipate that Wordsworth in others, though his views on nature are radically different from everything else.

But more than anything else, what you need to keep in mind is Blake's radicalism as social (())(13:19). Thank you.