Anusandhanvallari
Vol 2019, No.1
October 2019
ISSN 2229-3388

The Dialectics of 'Wonder' and 'Terror' in Blake's 'contrary states'

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Abstract: The article explores the conceptualisation of the visionary aesthetic of Blake by examining *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* with a focus on the "sublime". It argues that while Burke establishes a psychological blueprint for the 'sublime' rooted in 'terror' and 'obscurity', William Blake transcends this empirical framework by repositioning the 'sublime' within a spiritualised, dialectical poetic vision. The synthesis of the two trajectories is seen in Theodore Watts Dunton's "Renascence of Wonder" as a spiritual reawakening, rather than a historical anomaly. By tracing this lineage, the article illuminates how the aesthetic of cosmic awe moved from a sensation of terror to an instrument of psychological and social liberation. The article examines how 'wonder', the 'sublime' and 'terror' interact in Blake's composition while serving as a precedent for the romantic revival. It does so by navigating the "two contrary states of the human soul" that complements the visionary aesthetic of Blake.

Keywords: Blake; Burke; Theodore Watts-Dunton; Sublime; Wonder; Terror; Innocence; Experience; Aesthetics; Art; Poetry; Romanticism; Romantic Revival; Renascence of Wonder,

The trajectory of British literary aesthetics from the mid-eighteenth century to the twilight of the Victorian era can be understood as an ongoing response to the rigid boundaries of Enlightenment rationalism. At the core of this transformation lies a radical redefinition of how human consciousness interacts with the vast, the terrifying, and the unexplained. Edmund Burke's foundational text, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), initiated this paradigm shift by altering aesthetic evaluation from objective harmony to subjective visceral experience. Burke decoupled the 'sublime' from classical rhetorical style and re-anchored it in the human nervous system, famously identifying terror and obscurity as its primary catalysts. However, Burke's aesthetic remained fundamentally empirical and reactive. It was William Blake, writing at the height of the Romantic dawn, who took these raw materials of psychological awe and transformed them. In *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794), Blake liberates the sublime from Burkean fear, elevating it into a vehicle for divine, poetic vision that actively resists social and industrial mechanization. By the late nineteenth century, this visionary tradition found its theoretical culmination in Theodore Watts-Dunton's critical concept of the "Renascence of Wonder." Watts-Dunton looked backward to define the Romantic movement not merely as a historical epoch, but as a permanent, revitalizing spiritual awakening. Together, Burke, Blake, and Watts-Dunton chart an intellectual lineage wherein the aesthetic of awe evolves from a physiological response to material terror into a sophisticated weapon of metaphysical and cultural emancipation.

The philosophical formulation linking terror and the sublime to the Romantic Revival is famously attributed to Anglo-Irish philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757)*. While written just before the peak of Romantic Revival, Burke's treatise serves as an aesthetic foundation for the movement. In the latter halve of the period, the discussion of 'Romanticism' as the 'Renascence of wonder' was popularized by the Victorian critic Theodore Watts- Dunton. Although his critical prose remained largely uncollected during his lifetime, his two foundational essays: "Poetry" (1885/1911) and "The Renascence of Wonder in Poetry" which appears in the introduction to volume 3 of *Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature* (1903) were brought together posthumously as *Poetry and the Renascence of Wonder (1916).* At the heart of Watts-Dunton's poetics lies a structural dialectic between two conflicting human instincts, first articulated in his novel Aylwin (1898) and formally addressed in his 1903 treatise.

Burke may be credited with revolutionising the eighteenth-century aesthetics, by asserting that the sublime is rooted in terror. He argues that anything that insinuates feelings of pain, danger or vastness operates as a source of the sublime, producing a "delightful horror" when viewed from a safe distance. This can be seen prominently in 'Gothic fiction' and 'Romantic poetry', prompting writers to explore wild, obscure, and overwhelming natural landscapes. The very discourse preceding Blake's work complements the discussion in the Victorian period in Watts Dunton's "Renascence of Wonder". The two communicate with each other in the transit of Romantic compositions, via the corollaries of Wordsworth's "imagination" Coleridge's "supernatural", Keats' "spiritual beauty", Shelley's "cosmic wonder", Scott's "folklore", Byron's "rebellious individualism" and so on. Though the phrase was used in his earlier 19th century critical essays and encyclopedic entries, Watts Dunton formalised his definition of the Romantic Revival in *Poetry and the Renascence of Wonder (1916)*. He famously defined the Romantic movement not merely as a change in poetic form, but as a reawakening of the human spirit to the mystery and wonder of the universe. He contrasted this "wonder" with the cold, rigid rationalism of the 18th century enlightenment.

To understand this aesthetic evolution, one must first examine the empirical scaffolding erected by Edmund Burke. In the *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke radically divorces the Sublime from the Beautiful, establishing an influential taxonomy of human emotion. For Burke, the Beautiful is grounded in the social instinct and pleasure, characterized by smoothness, smallness, and light. Conversely, the Sublime is bound to the instinct of self-preservation and is fueled by ideas of pain, vastness, and danger. As Burke famously declares, "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger... is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (36). Central to Burke's formulation is the concept of "obscurity." He argues that to make anything very terrible, obscurity seems to be necessary, as absolute clarity extinguishes the imaginative dread that feeds the Sublime (54). In Burke's framework, the human mind is essentially a passive recipient of external, overwhelming stimuli. The Burkean Sublime paralyses the intellect, creating a state of "astonishment... in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (53). This reliance on material terror and sensory limitation created a profound psychological tension that subsequent poets found both liberating and inherently restrictive.

William Blake systematically confronted and dismantled this Burkean reliance on material passivity and terror, replacing it with an active, dialectical imagination. While Blake absorbed Burke's emphasis on energy, scale, and the limitations of rationalism, he rejected the notion that the Sublime required a state of submissive terror before nature. In *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, Blake addresses these aesthetic categories not as external landscapes, but as internal "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul." In "Songs of Innocence," poems like "The Lamb" present an aesthetic akin to Burke's definition of the Beautiful—soft, small, reassuring, and innocent. Yet Blake demonstrates that Innocence alone is vulnerable without the structural energy of Experience. It is in "Songs of Experience" that Blake invokes a highly spiritualized, internal version of the Burkean Sublime. The iconic poem "The Tyger" exemplifies this transition. When the speaker asks, "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" (lines 3-4), Blake invokes the classic Burkean elements of terror, obscurity, and cosmic vastness. The tiger is "burning bright / In the forests of the night" (1-2), a direct poetic manifestation of Burke's aesthetic of visual obscurity and dangerous power. However, whereas a Burkean observer would remain frozen in passive astonishment at this dangerous spectacle, Blake's poem forces an active, visionary engagement. The sublime energy of the tiger is not a material threat to be feared, but a divine, revolutionary force—the energetic counterpart to the lamb—necessary for breaking the "mind-forg'd manacles" of rationalist tyranny.

Watts-Dunton traces the reawakening of wonder from eighteenth century precursors vis-à-vis Thomas Chatterton, James Macpherson, and Thomas Percy's *Reliques*; who sought "through art and the forgotten world of old romance, that world of wonder and mystery and spiritual beauty" (Douglas 17). Alongside were, William Cowper and Robert Burns, whose "heartiness and melody" and sympathy with animal life broke through Augustan

artificiality (Watts-Dunton, "Poetry"; Douglas 38). Across the Romantic revival, Watts-Dunton evaluates each major poet according to his fidelity to the instinct of wonder and his command of poetic form.

In doing so, Samuel Taylor Coleridge is crowned as the supreme Romantic master of spiritual and supernatural wonder: "Coleridge's 'Christabel,' 'The Ancient Mariner,' and 'Kubla Khan' are, as regards the romantic spirit, above—and far above—any work of any other English poet" (Douglas 20). In Christabel, the hush of the natural world under Geraldine's spell ("The night-birds all that hour were still") achieves "that feeling of the inextricable web in which the human drama and external nature are woven which is the very soul of poetic wonder," surpassing even the storm in Macbeth. In Kubla Khan, Coleridge conquers irregular metre by obeying "emotional law" rather than stanzaic artifice, creating "a music as entrancing, as natural, and at the same time as inscrutable, as the music of the winds or of the sea" (Watts-Dunton, "Poetry").

While cautioning against ranking *The Excursion* and *The Prelude* below overtly supernatural romances merely on grounds of subject matter (Douglas 18), Watts-Dunton distinguishes Wordsworth's philosophical realism from Coleridge's supernaturalism. In "Poetry," Wordsworth exemplifies poetry whose mental value rests on "distinct and logical enunciation of ideas" in weighty iambic movement (akin to Lucretius). Watts-Dunton praises Wordsworth's maxim "That which comes from the heart goes to the heart" and judges the Ode on Intimations of Immortality "the finest irregular ode in the language," despite occasional lapses where rhyme is governed by neither stanzaic nor emotional inevitability.

Following the line of thought, Shelly is placed in the second class of poets with relative or egoistic vision, excelling in "the suggestive richness of passion or symbol latent in rhythm" (Watts-Dunton, "Poetry"). His "Ode to the West Wind" operates like "Arabian architecture," hanging over the reader "like the cloud pageantry of heaven" and achieving pure poetry free of rhetoric. Yet Watts-Dunton critiques *Prometheus Unbound* for "defect of mental grip" and "nebulosity of thought," observing that Shelley's universalist premise collapses into

'Manichaeism' within its first three hundred lines.

Keats is treated as the archetype of the poet of art, achieving "that perfect fusion of all poetic elements…in the manipulation of language so beautiful both for form and colour that thought and words seem but one blended loveliness" (Watts-Dunton, "Poetry"). Alongside Coleridge, Keats fuses verbal music and pictorial outline so that "the colour seems born of the music and the music born of the colour." His "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" rank immediately after Coleridge's "France" among English regular odes, while "La Belle Dame sans Merci" stands beside Christabel as "the most perfect efflorescence of the poetry of wonder and mystery" (Douglas 19).

Grouped within the second class of relative vision were the poets who "with each his one voice, can sing many tunes" yet remain tethered to their own ego. Byron is cited by Watts-Dunton in his opening critique of William Lisle Bowles's "invariable principles" (Watts-Dunton, "Poetry"). Byron's letter to John Murray ("Principles mean nothing more than the predilections of a particular age") serves Watts-Dunton as a foil for establishing first principles of concrete, emotional, and rhythmical form.

William Blake stands at the visionary vanguard of the Watts- Dunton's 'Renascence of Wonder'. Blake effects the sharpest rupture with Augustan acceptance, reclaiming both childlike innocence and prophetic sublimity through a radical reworking of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. Dunton views Blake's prophetic vision as breaking away from Enlightenment empiricism into childlike innocence and reworked sublime vision.

To appreciate the philosophical radicalism of William Blake's aesthetics and how Watts-Dunton later synthesizes it, one must examine Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), the dominant eighteenth century English treatise on aesthetic affect. Grounded in Lockean sensationalist psychology, Burke separates human passions into two mutually exclusive spheres: those belonging

to 'self-preservation' rooted in pain, danger, and terror; and those belonging to 'society' rooted in positive pleasure, sympathy, and love (Burke, pt. 1, sec. 6–10). Burke defines the sublime with stark physiological precision: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke, pt. 1, sec. 7). When danger does not press too close, it yields 'delight', a relative sensation arising from the removal or moderation of pain. The supreme psychological effect of the sublime is astonishment: "that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror," wherein "the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (Burke, pt. 2, sec. 1). Burke anchors this overwhelming astonishment in four principles that Blake would go on to invert later. 'Terror and Power', 'Obscurity' over 'Clearness', 'Privation' through vastness and darkness, and the binary of the 'sublime and the 'beautiful'.

In his Annotations to Reynolds's Discourses, Blake explicitly repudiates Burke's empirical foundation: "Burke's Treatise on the Sublime & Beautiful is founded on the Opinions of Newton & Locke." When Reynolds echoes Burke's claim that obscurity is a source of the sublime, Blake retorts that it is "Neither the Source of the Sublime nor of any Thing Else" (De Luca 100). For Blake, Burke's reliance on sensory deprivation and "dark, confused, uncertain images" (Burke, pt. 2, sec. 4) represents a fallen, Lockean epistemology that mistakes the limitation of corporeal perception for spiritual grandeur.

Yet, as V. A. De Luca demonstrates in "Blake and Burke in Astonishment!" (1989) and Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime (1991), Blake's hostility masks a deep dialectical engagement. Blake employs the term "astonishment" and its derivatives multiple times in his works far exceeding his counterparts. In his 6 July 1803 letter to Thomas Butts, Blake crystallizes this bifurcation from Burkean poetics: "Allegory addressed to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry" (De Luca 101). Parallel to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) ("Romantic Sublimes"), Blake locates sublimity in a rupture between mundane empirical cognition and transcendent intellectual reception; yet unlike Kant, Blake insists on determinate outline: "The Beauty proper for sublime art, is lineaments, or forms and features that are capable of being the receptacles of intellect" (A Descriptive Catalogue).

It is within Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul (1789/1794) that Blake stages his most incisive lyrical reworking of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*. At first glance, the two collections appear to mirror Burke's binary between the 'Beautiful and the Sublime'. *Songs of Innocence* inhabits the lexicon of Burkean beauty wherein "The Lamb" foregrounds diminutiveness ("Little Lamb, who made thee?"), tactile smoothness and softness ("Softest clothing wooly bright"), and gentle, harmless sound ("Such a tender voice"), evoking the submissive affection Burke associates with small, delicate objects (Burke, pt. 3, sec. 13–16). Conversely, *Songs of Experience* enters the Burkean terrain of terror, darkness, and institutional power; from the oppressive urban suffering of "London" to the predatory ferocity of "The Tyger."

However, Blake constructs "The Tyger" precisely to dismantle Burke's "eternal distinction" between beauty and sublimity. "Fearful Symmetry" as an oxymoron: Burke explicitly warns that "it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling (the sublime and the beautiful) in the same subject, without considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other" (Burke, pt. 3, sec. 13). By framing the tiger through "fearful symmetry" (lines 4, 24), Blake fuses Burke's sublime terror ("fearful," "deadly terrors," "dread hand") with formal proportion and aesthetic design. The creature's beauty is not a dilution of its terror, nor is its terror an amorphous void; rather, energy is given determinate artistic form. Where Burke insists that "darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light" and places the tiger in "the gloomy forest", Blake's 'Tyger' is "burning bright, / In the forests of the night" (lines1–2). Its sublimity radiates incandescent clarity rather than Burkean obscurity. The industrial-mythic

imagery of "hammer," "chain," "furnace," and "anvil" (lines 13–15) emphasizes deliberate, forged outline—rejecting Burke's claim that "clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions". As Harold Bloom observes in Blake's Apocalypse, the speaker of "The Tyger"—the Bard of Experience—succumbs to a "false sublimity," becoming "prostrate before a mystery entirely of his own creation" and retreating into "affrighted awe" when he asks, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" (line 20; "The Tyger"). In dramatic terms, the speaker's terror-struck paralysis enacts Burke's physiological astonishment through a mind "rob(bed) ... of all its powers of acting and reasoning" (Burke, pt. 2, sec. 2). Yet Blake's overarching diptych (Innocence and Experience) exposes this paralysis as a failure of fallen perception: because "everything that lives is holy," the Lamb and the Tyger share a single creative source ("History, Society and Culture"). Recent scholarship describes this as Blake's "exemptive sublime," an

ontology of becoming that liberates consciousness from both Lockean-Burkean empiricism and orthodox moral dualism ("The 'Peculiar Light' of Blakean Vision").

Watts-Dunton's Poetry and the Renascence of Wonder effects a remarkable critical synthesis of Burke's affective aesthetic and Blake's visionary reworking of it. On one side, Watts-Dunton absorbs Burke's anti-rationalist premise, shared with Longinus's "Peri Hypsous" ("The Sublime and Education")—that genuine poetry bypasses syllogistic reason to seize the passions directly. Burke's Part V argument that poetry moves the soul not by painterly imitation but by "sympathy" and emotional contagion (Burke, pt. 5) resonates directly with Watts-Dunton's definition of absolute poetry as reaching its conclusions "not by syllogism, but per saltum" (Watts-Dunton, "Poetry"). Even Burke's etymological observation that Greek "thambos "and English astonishment unite fear and wonder (Burke, pt. 2, sec. 2) anticipates Watts-Dunton's linkage of spiritual awe with poetic transport, wherein the poet's "sublime passages overawe no soul so imperiously as his own" (Watts-Dunton, "Poetry").

On the other side, Watts-Dunton refuses Burke's passive, terror-induced submission by aligning 'wonder' with Blake's active instinct of challenge. Three structural convergences demonstrate how Watts-Dunton integrates Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* into his overarching theory. First, The "Inspired Child" and Innocence: In "Poetry," Watts-Dunton asserts that to write true poetry the artist must shed worldly custom and become "an inspired child again," "born from above." This directly echoes the child-piping ethos of Blake's Songs of Innocence, where wonder is not Burkean diminutiveness or submissive affection, but a fearless, perceptive clarity. Second, the Impulse of Challenge and Experience: Whereas Burke's 'astonishment' suspends the soul's motions in horror before superior power (Burke, pt. 2, sec. 1, 5), Watts-Dunton defines Romantic wonder as "the impulse to confront these phenomena with eyes of inquiry and wonder" (Douglas 14). Like Blake's "The Tyger" which confronts cosmic terror with relentless interrogation rather than Augustan acquiescence which Watts-Dunton's wonder transforms Burkean fear into an active, anti-authoritarian challenge against the "Augustan pyramid." Third, the "Great Lyric" as Determinate Sublimity: In "Poetry," Watts-Dunton identifies the "Great Lyric" as an outpouring of the soul "towards God, like that of the God-intoxicated prophets and psalmists of Scripture." Here, Burke's physiological awe is spiritualized and fused with Blake's prophetic "lineaments," uniting emotional intensity with concrete, rhythmic form.

Blake's Poetics of Wonder

Blake's own theoretical statements, though never systematised into a critical treatise, anticipate Watts-Dunton's terms remarkably closely. Blake repeatedly opposed Imagination to Reason and Memory, and associated childhood, prophecy, and visionary perception with a faculty capable of seeing "a World in a Grain of Sand" (Blake, "Auguries of Innocence" line 1) — a formulation that could stand as a gloss on Watts-Dunton's claim that wonder restores mystery to the commonplace. Blake's illuminated method itself, in which hand-coloured designs surround and interpenetrate the printed text, materially enacts this refusal to separate the visionary from the domestic: cherubs twine through the letters of "The Lamb," while flames and serpentine forms coil around the

stanzas of "The Tyger." The physical form of the Songs is already an argument for the Renascence of Wonder, since it treats the printed page itself as a site of marvel rather than a transparent conveyance of sense.

It is worth noting that Blake wrote roughly a century before Watts-Dunton coined his phrase, and there is no question of direct influence in either direction. The value of reading Blake through Watts-Dunton's framework is therefore not genealogical but heuristic in that his categories give later readers a vocabulary for naming a quality that early reviewers of Blake found bewildering and that only gradually came to be recognised, over the course of the nineteenth century, as central to Romantic achievement. Blake's rehabilitation as a major poet — largely the work of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (1863) and the Pre-Raphaelite circle to which Watts-Dunton himself belonged as friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and literary executor of his estate — took place within precisely the critical milieu that produced the theory of the Renascence of Wonder (Gilchrist). Twentieth-century criticism would later confirm this affinity from the opposite direction: Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, the study that views Blake's standing as a major systematic thinker rather than an eccentric visionary; itself organised around the recovery of a mode of perception that refuses the flattening categories of empirical reason (Frye).

'Songs of Innocence' and 'wonder' as 'pastoral grace'

Songs of Innocence offers the clearest possible instance of Watts-Dunton's Renascence of Wonder in its most benign register. The volume is saturated with the perceptual world of the child — a world in which lambs, birds, and flowers are not merely observed but addressed, questioned, and found to contain divine presence. "The Lamb" enacts this directly: the child-speaker's naive catechism, "Little Lamb who made thee / Dost thou know who made thee" (Blake, "The Lamb" lines 1-2), answers itself with an identification of the lamb, the child, and Christ that depends entirely on a wondering, non-rational mode of apprehension. The poem's answer is not an argument but a recognition, achieved through the kind of imaginative fusion of categories that Watts-Dunton's theory associates with wonder rather than with the discursive reasoning of the Renascence of Order.

"The Ecchoing Green," "Infant Joy," and "A Cradle Song" extend this same quality into the rhythms of communal and domestic life, presenting play, birth, and maternal tenderness as continuous with a benevolent cosmic order. Even poems that touch on hardship, such as "The Chimney Sweeper" of Innocence, filter suffering through a visionary compensation: Tom Dacre's dream of an angel who releases the sweeps from their "coffins of black" (Blake, "The Chimney Sweeper" [Innocence] line 12) and leads them to a green plain where they "wash in a river and shine in the Sun" (line 16) is wonder doing precisely the work Watts-Dunton assigns it — restoring a sense of mystery and grace to a scene that unadorned social realism would render merely grim. The poem's closing line, "So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm" (line 24), is often read ironically by later criticism, and rightly so; but the irony depends on the reader recognising that the poem's wondering vision and its social message have pulled apart, which is itself evidence of how central wonder is to the volume's imaginative economy, even where it threatens to become complicit with the abuses it partly conceals.

'Songs of Experience' and 'wonder' turned to 'terror'

If Innocence demonstrates wonder as harmonious grace, Songs of Experience demonstrates what Watts-Dunton, following Burke, identified as wonder's darker sibling: the sublime, in which awe is inseparable from terror. "The Tyger" is the paradigm case. The poem's famous question, "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" (Blake, "The Tyger" lines 3-4), is structured entirely as an act of wondering interrogation, but the object of wonder has shifted from the gentle lamb to a "burning" predator whose creation implicates the same God responsible for innocence's lamb. By the poem's final stanza the question has hardened from possibility into defiance — "What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" (lines 23-24) — a shift from "could" to "dare" that registers wonder curdling into something closer to awe before an unanswerable moral enormity. The poem does not resolve its own question; it multiplies wonder into cosmic doubt, asking directly

whether “he who made the Lamb” also “make[s] thee” (line 20). This is wonder in precisely the mode that Burke and, after him, Watts-Dunton treated as sublime: an encounter with a power so vast and ungovernable that awe and dread become indistinguishable (Burke, pt. 2, sec. 2).

Other poems of Experience redirect wonder toward social and psychological terror rather than cosmic terror. “London” transforms the city itself into an object of visionary perception, in which the “mind-forg'd manacles” (Blake, “London” line 8) of institutional life become audible in the very streets, alongside the “youthful Harlots curse” that “blasts the new-born Infants tear” (lines 14-15) — a wondering attentiveness to hidden suffering that is the experiential counterpart to innocence's wondering attentiveness to hidden grace. “The Chimney Sweeper” of Experience strips away the compensatory vision of its companion poem, leaving only a child “in notes of woe” (line 2) whose parents have gone to “praise God & his Priest & King / Who make up a heaven of our misery” (lines 11-12) . Here, ‘wonder’ curdles into prophetic accusation, but it remains the same faculty of seeing through the ordinary into something vast and terrible, rather than a wholly different, disenchanted mode of perception. “The Sick Rose” and “A Poison Tree” similarly invest small domestic images e.g. a rose, a garden, a tree with a mysterious, almost occult charge of corruption and repressed feeling, exactly mirroring the technique by which Innocence invests small domestic images with grace. Historicist criticism has shown how closely these images are entangled with the specific political and religious controversies of Blake's ‘London’, the established Church, the monarchy, and the sexual and economic exploitation of the poor (Erdman; Thompson), which suggests that Blake's ‘wonder’, in Experience, is never merely private or mystical but is continuously alert to the structures of power around it.

The Contrary States of Wonder and sublime

Reading the two cycles together through Watts-Dunton's lens suggests a refinement of his theory that Blake himself seems to anticipate. Watts-Dunton's historical narrative treats the Renascence of Order and the Renascence of Wonder as successive dominants in literary history, with wonder eventually displacing or answering order's exhaustion. Blake's Songs, by contrast, present wonder itself as internally divided, containing both an innocent and an experienced mode, without either one displacing the other in any final way. Blake's later addition of “The Tyger” to answer “The Lamb,” and his structuring of the whole work around paired or contrasting poems, suggests that he understood wonder not as a historical stage to be superseded but as a permanent double capacity of the human soul — what his title page calls its two contrary states. Blake's own summary description of the volumes, that they show the “Two Contrary States of the Human Soul,” offers, as Frye and later critics have argued, the best available frame for approaching the collection: innocence and experience are complementary rather than sequential, and neither is simply superior to the other (Frye).

In this respect, Blake's *Songs* can be read as dramatizing the oscillation between order and wonder that Watts-Dunton mapped across centuries of English poetry, except that in Blake both poles belong to wonder. The rational, worldly experiences arising out of interaction with social life such as priesthood, monarchy, commerce, the mind-forg'd manacles of institutional life, that plays the restrictive, order-imposing role Watts-Dunton assigned to Augustan classicism. This suggests a productive complication of the framework: Blake locates the true antagonist of wonder not in a prior poetic style but in social and psychological structures of control. He shows that ‘experience’ does not simply lack ‘wonder’ but redirects it, turning the same visionary faculty against the very forces i.e. the church, the state and the economic exploitation that innocence's ‘wonder’ had left unexamined. Judged by Watts-Dunton's own categories, Blake's achievement is therefore in one sense a more radical ‘Renascence of Wonder’ than the theory strictly anticipates: not a recovery of primitive awe as an alternative to critical or social consciousness, but a fusion of wonder with critique, in which the visionary and the political become inseparable (Bloom).

The conception of the 'Renascence of Wonder' is not exclusively supernatural/ gothic or spiritual in its scope. Dunton's distinction between "the spiritual wonder" of the Elizabethan poets and "the simply terrene wonder" of Chaucer demonstrates that he also recognises the poetic significance of the visible world, earthly beauty and human experience. His reference to the "wonder of the 'world at hand'" further establishes that wonder can arise from the familiar world immediately accessible to human perception.

"With regard to what we have called the realistic side of the romantic movement as distinguished from its purely poetical and supernatural side, Nature was for the Augustan temper much too ungenteel to be described realistically. Yet we must not suppose that in the eighteenth century Nature turned out men without imaginations, without the natural gift of emotional speech, and without the faculty of gazing honestly in her face. She does not work in that way." (Douglas)

Watts-Dunton's *Poetry and the Renascence of Wonder* offers far more than a late Victorian survey of English verse; it constructs a coherent philosophical genealogy of the Romantic imagination. By situating Chaucer's terrene wonder, Shakespeare's absolute dramatic vision, and Pope's Augustan pyramid of acceptance alongside the varied achievements of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Blake, Watts-Dunton reveals Romanticism as a fundamental shift in human consciousness. He acknowledged Blake as an early visionary rebel in the face of eighteenth century rational "common sense". Blake's mystical, dream like "phantasmagories" are deemed as juncture of departure from the prosaic "impulse of acceptance" of the Augustan age. Despite this acknowledgement, he goes on to argue that the English Romantic school did not spring from an "isolated phenomenon" or a single eccentric genius but through the current of a medievalist revival (Chatterton, Macpherson, Percy into Coleridge, Keats and Rossetti etc.).

When read alongside Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* emerges as the decisive aesthetic pivot of this shift. In "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," Blake dismantles Burke's physiological segregation of diminutive beauty and terrifying obscurity, forging instead a determinate "fearful symmetry". It exposes terror struck submission as a failure of fallen perception. Watts-Dunton's subsequent synthesis of Burkean emotional seizure and Blakean challenge seems crystallized in his "inspired child," his "Great Lyric," and his impulse of wonder demonstrates how late Victorian criticism anticipated contemporary theoretical debates over the cognitive, ethical, and liberating dimensions of the Romantic sublime.

'Innocence' embodies 'wonder' as pastoral grace and 'Experience' embodies wonder as 'sublime terror', and the two together enact, at the level of one poet's imagination, the historical rhythm traced across centuries of English verse. Yet Blake's *Songs* also exceed and complicate both Burke's and Watts-Dunton's schema, refusing to resolve the two contrary states into a simple succession and instead insisting, a full generation before Wordsworth and Coleridge, that wonder is not a stage in literary history but a permanent, divided, and politically charged capacity of the human soul. In this sense, Blake does not merely illustrate the 'Renascence of Wonder' or the 'sublime' in aesthetics; he anticipates and deepens the theory that would later be devised to explain him.

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