

## Blake, Hardy and the Poetics of Mixed Beliefs

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### Introduction

William Blake and Thomas Hardy may in no circumstance be considered contemporaries for Hardy was born 85 years, almost a century after Blake died. History puts the two English classics far apart with almost nothing, superficially, connecting them together - not even Hardy's wide reading skills. Mallikarjun Patil posits that Hardy "...read William Shakespeare, John Milton and admired the romantic poets" (2). This does not however suggest anything specific about his knowledge of Blake. That notwithstanding, it has not been proven that his admiration of the romantics excluded Blake, one of the prominent romantics. Both poets belong to literary traditions or movements that are radically different - romanticism for Blake then Victorianism and Modernism for Hardy. Nevertheless, the considerations that bring the two prominent English poets together far outweigh the factors that put them apart. It would be noticed that the two iconic poets possess almost the same kindred spirits. The homogeneity in their belief patterns and existential views, and most especially, the fact of being the most misunderstood English poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, constitute not only the reason for putting them together, but also serve as the main purpose of this discourse.

Like Hardy who admired his predecessors, Blake fell in love with the classics or ancient literature. Margaret J. Downes observes, "Although he is of two minds about the praiseworthiness of the ancient Greeks, William Blake greatly admired the roots of their literature" (174). In "A Vision of the Last Judgment," Blake himself remarked that "the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery and Real Visions.... The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients call'd the Golden Age" (Johnson/Grant, xxiv). He was widely hailed and appreciated as a visionary poet, while others described him as revolutionary, who was bent on changing the status quo imposed by the conservative political and religious institutions of the time. "Blake's writings are an endeavour to loosen or break society's 'mind-forg'd manacles', which had been created through the edicts of a repressive church and supported by Parliament" (Timothy Vines 115). Hardy does not fall short of Blake's revolutionary spirit. By almost the same measure, he desired to see the oppressed liberated and above all, see an improvement in the deplorable living conditions of the poor perpetrated by repressive human institutions. In the same light, Francis A. Bennion explains,

“Impatient of convention, he assisted the reaction from Victorian strictness and in his supreme sympathy for human misfortune” (1), Benion adds, “he helped to secure recognition of the fact that labourers had human feelings and that the poor had other distresses than are merely brought about by poverty” (ibid). Evidently, Blake and Hardy share similar social concerns and sympathy for the masses.

### **Misunderstood Poets**

Apart from their similar social concerns, their belief patterns or controversial existential views evidently stand as the strongest uniting elements between them. Belief, according to Irving Hexham, is “What is believed; trust, faith or intellectual assent; a form of knowledge which may or may not be based on facts. In religion belief is often a form of commitment to a way of life and involves the acceptance of the Dogma of a religious community” (32). The consideration that Blake was a visionary poet who attracted the admiration of many is not shared by all. Shirley Dent rather holds that Blake “...was a confused failure but a great humanist” (13). The apparent confusion in which Blake found himself, earned him the name ‘madman’. Blake’s apparent ‘insanity’ is seen by some critics in terms of his outright rejection of the word of God or the Bible, where he sought personal approach to scriptural interpretations. Some critics ascribe his controversial worldview to diverse sources of his inspiration, which include: German mystic Jakob Boehme, Swedenborgianism, and Blake’s personal visions. “From as early as four years of age Blake experienced visions of ghostly monks and angels. He saw and had conversations with the angel Gabriel, the Virgin Mary and many other historical figures” (Jessica Rowe 1). In this regard, Rachel Galvin does not hesitate to state what he thinks of Blake, “My personal opinion is that he suffered from a kind of schizophrenia...Later in his life he claimed that he was not a poet, but that his poems were dictated to him” (2). More so, Edward Friedlander argues that “William Blake was wrong about his visions and voices. They are not guides to metaphysical truths for all of us” (Par.6). In the same vein, Timothy Vines argues that Blake’s theological and mythological development which culminated in a belief system both radical and deeply spiritual” (116), caused some people to “dismiss his works as lunatic rantings” (ibid).

Blake moved away from the conventional on matters of religion and entered into a universe of his own. He said to himself “I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s”. Blake did not believe that God exists apart from man, but says expressly, ‘Man is All imagination. God is Man and exists in us and we in Him... imagination or the Human Eternal

Body in Every Man... Imagination is the Divine Body in Every man' (Annotations to Berkeley 's 'Sins') For Blake, God and the imagination are one; that is, God is the creative and spiritual power in man, and apart from man the idea of God has no meaning. When Blake speaks of the divine, it is with reference to his power and not any external or independent godhead. He didn't only move away from the orthodoxy of his days, but attacked conventional Christian religious views. His 'deviant views' are evident in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a series of texts written in imitation of Biblical prophecy, wherein, Blake states many Proverbs of Hell:

Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.  
As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys.

In *The Everlasting Gospel*, Blake does not present Jesus as a philosopher or traditional messianic figure but as a supremely creative being, above dogma, logic and even morality:

If he had been Antichrist, Creeping Jesus,

He'd have done anything to please us:

Gone sneaking into the Synagogues

And not used the Elders & Priests like Dogs,

But humble as a Lamb or an Ass,

Obeys himself to Caiaphas.

God wants not man to humble himself.

Blake operated in a cosmos of his own where he designed his mythology, in his prophetic books. Therein, he describes a series of characters, including 'Urizen', 'Enitharmon', 'Bromion' and 'Luvah'. This mythology seems to have a basis in the Bible and in Greek mythology, and it accompanies his ideas about the everlasting Gospel.

One of Blake's reasons for the rejection of orthodox Christianity lies in his idea that it encouraged the suppression of natural desires and discouraged earthly joy. In *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, Blake says:

Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed & govern'd their Passions or have No Passions, but because they have Cultivated their Understandings. The Treasures of Heaven are not Negations of Passion, but Realities of Intellect, from which all the Passions Emanate Uncurbed in their Eternal Glory.

Furthermore, he argues in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

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, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd 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.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

It is important to note that Blake didn't believe in the idea that the body and soul are distinct entities. Rather, he saw the body as an extension of the soul derived from the 'discernment' of the senses. Therefore, the conventional believe or emphasis placed on the denial of bodily urges is a fatal mistake resulting from misunderstanding of the relationship between body and soul. Elsewhere, he describes Satan as the 'State of Error', and as being beyond salvation.

It is heretical from the Christian theological perspective, Blake's opposition of the sophistry of theological thought that excuses pain, admits evil and apologises for injustice. He rejected piety or self-denial, which he associated with religious repression and particularly with sexual repression, when he says: "Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity. / He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence." He considered the notion of 'sin' as a means to deprive people of their desires and believed that restraint in obedience to a moral code imposed from the outside was against the spirit of life:

Abstinence sows sand all over  
 The ruddy limbs & flaming hair,  
 But Desire Gratified  
 Plants fruits & beauty there. (Gnomic Verses X)

Blake also did not subscribe to the teaching of God as Lord, an entity separate from and superior to mankind. This is evident in his words about Jesus Christ: "He is the only God ... and so am I, and so are you." More so, the phrase "men forgot that All deities reside in the human

breast” in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* reveals his belief in liberty and equality in society and between the sexes. On the whole Blake’s notion of hell widely differs from the conventional belief of Milton and Dante. He rather sees Hell not as a punishment, but as a source of unrepressed feelings, creative energy, personal spiritual progression. Therefore, hell stands in opposition to the more or less regulated and authoritarian perception of heaven.

In both “The Little Boy Lost” and “The Little Boy Found” of *Songs of Innocence* and “A Little Boy Lost” in *Songs of Experience*, Blake criticises organised religion for misleading and repressing young minds. He supports finding God and religion through the natural divinity of all living things. The harsh reaction of organised religion to this idea is illustrated in the latter, “A Little Boy Lost,” in which the youth is actually burned for his rebellious thinking. In “The Chimney Sweeper,” in *Songs of Experience*, the boy in the poem does not expect a merciful angel to save him, rather, he blames God, the church, and the King, for the misery, which he is forced to endure. The boy does not even seem to believe in heaven, or at least he doesn't have the sweet, innocent view that is portrayed in “The Chimney Sweeper” from *Songs of Innocence*. He thinks that it is God, the church, and the king, which includes his parents and the rest of society, who “make up a heaven of our misery.” Blake's dreary and contemptuous view of religion is reflected throughout in *Songs of Experience*, as the adults shatter the visions of those childhood memories. The dream-like ideals are crushed by a harsher reality and the survivors are left with the scars. Blake raises the question of evil's existence in “The Tyger”. “Did he who make the lamb make thee” Rather than accepting traditional religion from an organised church, Blake designed his own mythology, which appears to be based on the Bible and Greek mythology and nature. He based his religion on the joy of man and nature, which he believed glorified God.

Hardy, in the same vein, “complex and multifaceted ... His philosophy seemed to be full of contradictions” (Bernard J. Paris 203). Like Blake, Hardy distanced himself from religious and social orthodoxies. He believed in a First Cause; and his preoccupation was not God’s existence but his nature. In this vein we see a marriage of ideas between Hardy and Blake. They are in fact not atheist per se but are not committed Christians. Hardy was concerned with the problem of evil and fascinated by the refusal of human beings to draw the obvious conclusions from the injustice of their lot. Furthermore, Hardy’s search for an understanding of the nature and identity of God is central in his Poetry. He gives a variety of names to the power that governs the universe: the Immanent Will, the First Cause, the Supreme Power, the Intangible Cause, the Prime Mover, amongst

others. His poetry offers an exposition of the various ideas he explored in his attempt to make sense of the traditional Christian God of his youth in the context of the rapidly changing world. Hardy himself was aware of the varied and ambivalent nature of the ideas he expressed as indicated in the introduction to "Winter Words": "no harmonious philosophy is attempted in these pages – or in any bygone pages of mine, for that matter" (834). Hardy's poetry does not always offer a clear distinction between the forces governing the universe, nature and the first cause or God. They seem to have an individual identity in some poems and yet in others they tend to merge and become indistinguishable from one another. Like Blake, this partly accounts for his being misunderstood by his readers.

Similarly, In "Doom and She" Nature and God are portrayed like split personalities of one being. Apparently they are jointly responsible for the creation of humankind. Nature calls humankind "Our clay-made creature" (L.13) and worries that she has "schemed a world of strife" (L.24) while "all creatures who owe thee fief" (L.34) suggests that God exercises power over all the earth. Nature's workings are imperfect because she is blind. She is sensitive to the suffering on earth audible in the "multitudinous moan" (L.23), is compassionate, and wishes to understand and improve the lot of humankind. It is important to note that Hardy's existential question does not immediately qualify him as an atheist, rather it situates him in the position of lack of genuine faith. Christianity is founded on faith, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11.6). On this score, Hardy's position is appreciated as difficult and at the same time logical because his doubts place him out of the realm of Christian faith. His poetry and biography suggest that emotionally he clings to the hope that God is a positive force but intellectually he cannot evidently support this idea. Therefore, his art, and particularly his poetry, oscillates between hope and doubt and in his heart lies the everlasting and unanswered question about the nature of God. He appears to sit on the fence such that he can be viewed and appreciated from both sides. Hardy's problem is more of a crisis of faith or unbelief than a rejection of God. He is certainly of the category of persons who believe that God exists but lack the faith to believe that He can change or turn their situation round. As an agnostic adult (if only he is one), he still seeks signs that would verify his youthful conception of God. "A Sign Seeker" illuminates Hardy's search for proof of God's omniscience and in "The Imprecipient" he expresses distress at being excluded from the community of faithful. Looking in from the outside at the "bright band of believers" in their cosy faith cocoon, the poet feels miserable because God

seems to have placed Himself out of reach; "He who breathes All's Well to these / Breathes no Al's – Well to me." (15-16).

To Hardy, humankind has been loving, obedient, and kinder to God than He has been to him, "... even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon, [they] invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears" (Return of the Native, VI, i). Hardy believed that man is ridiculed by Fate. And to him, it is even more ridiculous or ironical for humankind to praise and adore the very forces that destroy him. In his poems he tries to make the reader see a number of possibilities, many of which are intended to mock the First Cause. His position in this is that "the said Cause is neither moral nor immoral, but unmoral": "loveless and hateless ... which neither good nor evil knows" (Life, II, 216-217). This metaphysical view of things is very unaccommodating in a Christian world. Hardy enters and functions in a cosmos which is apparently his and makes him controversial. Hardy's perception of God, his resentment in favour of man, Paris argues, "sounded ... a note of metaphysical revolt. They gave man a dignity, I felt, far greater than he could ever derive from cringing before a beneficent God whose ways must be deemed just not because they are right in the eyes of man, but because they are His" (204). In the same light like Blake, Hardy refused in Paris's words, "to relinquish the human perspective; he made man the measure of all things" (ibid). It is important to note that Blake believes similarly that man is everything and that God can only be made manifest through or in man. Man, in Hardy's universe, is both great and small. He is a toy of Fate but the judge of Creation. Man, not God, is the hope of the universe; he is pitifully weak, but he alone has conscious purpose and values.

Laura Elisabeth Prinselaar observes that "Hardy sees the reigning power of the universe as being essentially unjust and morally blind, as in his poem "Hap" (Par.1). In the poem, Hardy expresses the belief that no deity, even malevolent, rules the universe. Chance alone--represented by the personifications "Crass Casualty" and "dicing Time" dictate events. Hap is a sonnet in which the octave presents hypothetical frame which says that there exists a malevolent god who controls the universe; and explores the emotional merits of that concept. Then the sestet, which indicates that the hypothetical situation just portrayed is not the actual case, but that chance alone detects events and points the frustration that results from this realisation. The octave for example states:

If but some vengeful god would call to me  
From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,  
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,

that thy love's loss is my hate's profiting! (L.1-4)

Hardy seems to create a balance between our 'sorrow' and god's 'ecstasy,' our 'love's loss' and the god's 'hate's profiting,' suggesting some heavenly accounting system biased in favour of god. The pitiful feeling of blaming a 'vengeful God' suggested by 'half eased' implies that if Hardy levy blame on this deity, the speaker would "clench [himself] and die /Steeled by a sense of ire unmerited." (L.5). Hardy in the last six lines explore why bright possibilities and happiness fail. He begins with "But not so." which refutes the grounds of the hypothetical octave. There is no 'vengeful god' that can be blamed when 'joy lies slain' and 'sown' 'hope' 'unblooms.'

Hardy's agnosticism prevails probably because of the chaotic nature of humanity. Man's joy and happiness lie strained and the best of his enterprises flop. Curiously enough, when the sufferer asks why it should be so, the answer is, man's destiny lies in the hands of a blind sinister and indifferent force that arbitrarily sends out joys and woes to human beings. Hardy emphasizes the futility of human existence and endeavours. In "Nature's Questioning" he doubts and wonders in his declaration, "we wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!" (12). Similarly, he portrays a tragic undertone in "God Forgotten". By trying to remind God that He has neglected His creation somewhere, insinuates the fact that God has completely forgotten about his creation. The bridge that links God and His creation has been severed as a result of God's silence. In "Nature's Questioning" Hardy asks existential questions that rather puts on the side of doubting God's existence than questioning to seek and know Him better.

Has some Vast Imbecility,  
Mighty to build and blend,  
But impotent to tend,  
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?

Or come we of an Automaton  
Unconscious of our pains?...  
Or are we live remains  
Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone? (L.13-20)

The same spirit is observed in his novel *The Return of the Native* where Hardy creates characters and puts them in a world governed by a harsh and indifferent ironic God. According to Prinselaar, "Hardy's



characters live in a world governed by these twin powers, whose influence all too often is for evil, not for good” (Par.2).

Andrew Corbett states that Hardy “regarded Christianity as “anti-moral”” (3) Thomas Hardy regarded Evangelical Christians as “fools”” (3). To Corbett “Hardy despised God...It appears that Hardy hated the God he didn’t believe in!” (3). Similarly, J Clipper posits that “Hardy reflected Nietzsche's agonised cry that 'God is dead', in his novels. His view of life was that since there is no God to give meaning to life, Man is alone in the Universe, no better and no worse than other creatures who live or have lived for a brief moment on this speck called Earth” (Par1).

In “A Philosophical Fantasy”, Hardy humorously shows his doubt as to how he should address God:

Such I ask you, Sir or Madam  
 (I know no more than Adam,  
 Even vaguely, what your sex is,  
 Though feminine I had thought you  
 Till seers as ‘Sire’ besought you;  
 - And this my ignorance vexes  
 Some people not a little,  
 And, though me not one tittle,  
 It makes me sometimes choose to  
 Call you 'It', if you'll excuse me? (L.26-35)

In “The Convergence of the Twain”, he describes dramatically how the great liner Titanic and the iceberg each moved across hundreds of miles of ocean to collide. Thereby causing the reader to think of “Fate”, the power of natural forces, and whether this was an accident or a planned “Act of God”. Consider Hardy’s statement, “I have been looking for God for 50 years and I think if He had existed, I should have discovered Him...”

Hardy’s existentialist philosophy is highlighted as he suggests that man is at the mercy of God and that there is no logic in the way man’s joys and woes are distributed by the blind and implacable fate. ‘Hap’ highlights how the chaotic nature of man’s situation pushes him to question his own very existence. “Thou suffering thing ... is my hate’s profiting!!!” Hardy stretches his existential philosophy of meaninglessness of life in ‘God Forgotten’ wherein, he tries in a tragic undertone to remind God that He has neglected His creation. Here the bridge that links God and Man,

according Hardy is broken. So in 'The Subalterns' Hardy portrays man as a mere existence absolutely helpless in the hands of the supernatural.

I did not will a grave  
Should end thy pilgrimage today  
But I too am a slave.

What makes these poets controversial and misunderstood is not only their outright rejection of the Christian orthodoxy, but also the instability in their views about the Supreme Deity. In as much as they reject total conventional dependence on the Him they equally turn around to acknowledge His existence and supremacy. It appears these poets find it almost impossible completely discard God in their very existence. They somehow were moulded by the word of God in their early up-bring. In spite of the gloomy picture that Hardy paints of God and especially, His relationship with Man, Hardy emphasized that a hope for the moral advancement of humanity lies at the heart of his poetry. He states in his 1909 Preface to *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses* that his collection of poetry "will, I hope, take the reader forward, even if not far, rather than backward" (Complete Poems 190), and in his important "Apology," which prefaces his 1922 collection of *Late Lyrics and Earlier*,

Hardy writes concerning his works that "what is to-day...alleged to be 'pessimism' is, in truth, only... 'questionings' in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also" (Complete Poems 557). Due to impressionism which appears to be a dominant characteristic of Hardy's writing, it is difficult to derive a single, clear idea of how Hardy thinks about humanity's future. Robert Schweik cautions the reader of Hardy that the influences of the various religious, scientific, and philosophical texts which Hardy had read "often overlap, and 2 identification of how they affected Hardy's work must sometimes be no more than a tentative pointing to diverse and complex sets of possible sources," he observes further that "Hardy was intellectually very much his own man...usually sceptical and hesitant to embrace wholeheartedly any of the various systems of ideas current in his day" (54). Similarly, in his biography of Hardy, Michael Millgate points out difficulty of clearly and simply defining Hardy's views: "The lack of congruence between the views expressed on...two occasions seems not to have disturbed Hardy himself... and Hardy seems to have been constantly drawn towards...a reluctance to adopt absolute or even firm positions, a willingness to see virtue in all sides of a question" (205).

### **Their Positive Reception of Christian Beliefs**

Blake's religious ambivalence is astonishing because reading the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and some of his poems in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, leaves one with the impression that he was not an atheist. Timothy Vines observes that "*Songs of Innocence and of Experience* represents Blake's theological and mythological development, which culminated in a belief system both radical and deeply spiritual, causing some to dismiss his works as lunatic rantings" (116). However, Blake's Christian beliefs and theological perceptions are rooted in the scriptures. Although he sought personal approach to interpretation, his works do not fail to give a picture of one who believed in the Bible and in Christ. Robert Rix points out that "Information about Blake's religious upbringing is relatively scant. We know that he was christened on 11 December 1757 in St James Church, Piccadilly. Since this meant that he was received into the Church of England, it would seem to indicate that his parents would have held Anglican sympathies (2). In the same light, Michael Farrell argues that "Blake believed that the Bible is true inspiration in cleansing the doors of perception and, subsequently, in its ability to rouse the artist and reader to realise the creative potential of his poetic and prophetic imagination" (616-17). In fact the Bible as an inspirational book or the book of life is not limited to art but can inspire man to every good works. "For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them" (Ephesians 2:10). Blake being a Moravian, Rix states that "It is fundamental to Moravian belief that the Deity is never abstract, but that the full manifestation of divinity was revealed in Christ" (11). Stretching the point further, Shirley Dent argues that "Blake was a Christian" and that "It's a hard assertion to refute. Blake was, by his own free and frequent admission, a Christian" (1). At the end of his epic illuminated poem "Jerusalem", Christ is projected as a unifying and all-encompassing entity:

As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man  
We call Jesus the Christ; and he in us, and we in him  
Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life.

Blake was inspired by the scripture which says, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you" (John 15:4). Samuel Palmer, in relation to Blake's death reported, "He said that He was going to that Country he had all his life wished to see and expressed Himself Happy hoping for Salvation through Jesus Christ" . Experience proves that man becomes his/her real self only when he/her faces death. Also, it takes a devoted heart to God to see beyond the physical world and long for everlasting live in paradise. Therefore, it would be imbalanced to conclude that Blake was not a committed Christian or that he had no hope in the Christian God. In the

same vein, Raine explains that the basic principles of Blake's beliefs include "knowledge, the understanding that all men are the sons of God, and because all men are the sons of God, the potential for "Divine Humanity" (2). Our being the sons of God gives us divine qualities, for we are God's image divine. Like Tennyson, Blake was conscious that God cannot be accessed through reason and so rejected the notion that the world can best be perceived through reason, and that this inhibits the mind from embracing and assimilating the imagination within everyday perceptive realities. Definitely, God's ways are different from ours and so we must not rely on our own understanding. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). So Blake argues that "If one is to see that 'heaven [is] in a wild flower," one must be able to see the "Infinite in all things. To do so also brings one closer to God.

Also, "The Tyger," exemplifies the conception of the Divine being in all things. In the poem, Blake marvels over the fact that the same Divine hand, which "made the Lamb" also created a dreaded and sublime creature as the Tyger: "What immortal hand or eye/Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" (L.23-24). If God is present in these two contradictory creatures - lamb and tiger, then He can be found anywhere. The Tyger and the Lamb are the same because God exists in them both. In "The Little Boy Found" Blake moves from his unconventional perception of God, (that of believing that God does not live in paradise but exists in us), to believing the conventional idea that he is a separate entity. God appears in this poem to save the little boy lost. So He is not an abstract but a loving and caring personage - a demonstration of God taking the human form to save humankind from his plight.

The little boy lost in the lonely fen  
Led by the wand'ring light,  
Began to cry, but God every nigh  
Appeard like his father in white

God 'ever nigh' means near in both time and place, appears as the boy's father, dressed in white. In the poem there are three persons: the lost boy weeping, the desperate mother and the father (God) intervening to reunite mother and child. Blake indeed recognises and believes that God is a father and not an inspirational energy as he claims in other poems. That is another instance where Blake exhibits split personality and mixed belief patterns. "The Little Boy Lost" Like the "Little Boy Found," projects the idea of why the father had to supernaturally appear to rescue the boy:

Father, father, where are you going  
O do not walk so fast  
Speak father, speak to your little boy  
Or else I shall be lost.

It would be important to note that Blake does not only expose the irresponsibility of the parents over their children during the industrial revolution, but also to show the need for the helpless to believe and rely on God the Almighty, who cannot abandon them in their distress, especially, in a society where there is no real security for the children.

Concretely, Blake believes in the “Divine Image” that God created man in his image and so man is a reflection of the attributes of God, which are ‘Mercy’, ‘Pity’, ‘Peace’ and ‘Love’. That all humankind pray to these attributes, which are ‘God’. “For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love, / Is God our Father dear;” That man is also a reflection of these qualities because we are an image of God.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,  
Is God our Father dear;  
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,  
Is man, his child and care. (L.1-8)

Blake’s conception of God in this poem ties with the biblical story of creation, which holds that, “God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). He appears more orthodox and conventional in this poem for he sees the relation between God and humankind from a purely scriptural perspective.

Also, “The Lamb” epitomises innocence and the relationship between the young and the divine. He uses the lamb as a metaphor for Christ, the Son of God. The child in the poem asks, “Little Lamb, who made thee?” Upon learning that the same one who created the lamb also created the child, a sense of unity establishes itself “between the human self, the natural world, and the divine kingdom”. This “oneness” can also be seen as the connection between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. By putting both the child and the creation of God on the same scale, by calling each a “lamb”, the child experiences a sense of protection in being as important as Christ himself is.

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,  
Little Lamb I'll tell thee!

He is called by thy name,

For he calls himself a Lamb:

Like the biblical story, "Gazing at Jesus as he walked by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'" (John 1:36) Blake is transported from his notion of God as an abstract to the belief that he is the creator of heaven and earth.

"Book the First" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, contains a poem-within-a-poem, a "Bard's Prophetic Song." The climax of the Song is the Bard's sudden vision of the "Holy Lamb of God": "Glory! Glory! to the Holy lamb of God: / I touch the heavens as an instrument to glorify the Lord". The vision of the "Lamb of God" is traditional in apocalyptic literature. In this case the Bard's final burst of vision is important not only for its content, but also for its placement in the poem. The Bard's sudden vision of the Lamb of God testifies that man need not remain "in chains of the mind Lock'd up." The same idea is stretched further in "The Garden of Love" where Blake, because of his conviction about God, becomes critical of the church, which in his days was more materialistic than spiritual. Blake's "The Shepherd" is a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Christians. John Howard argues that "the implied analogy between the shepherd's protection of the sheep and God's protection of man is given pictorial form as the guardian shepherd watches over his huddled flock" (48). Similarly, Anne Kostalenetz Mellor observes that "the mortal shepherd evokes the heavenly shepherd of Psalms 23. Just as the ewes reply to the 'lambs innocent call,' so the shepherd responds to the needs of his flock and God answers the prayers of man" (4).

Interestingly, Hardy like Blake wasn't as negative towards God as some critics believe. Hardy had an important evangelical phase that left a deep impress on his thought. Pamela Dalziel argues that "Evangelical style and theology' that the eighteen-year-old Hardy wrote, reveals convincing evidence "of his already being sympathetic to Evangelicalism by October 1858" (12). Hardy, in Dalziel's words, "taking sufficiently seriously his so-called 'dream' of ordination to practice writing a sermon, and, most significantly, his having a personal faith that was both ardent and orthodox" (20), is evident of his early years commitment to Christian religion.

Citing Timothy Hand's 1989 "Notable book on Hardy and Christianity," Dalziel lists Hardy's lifelong connections to the orthodox Christianity he was soon to abandon. The document reveals that Hardy had in his early years inculcated a Christian spirit, which remained in him

even when he grew old. No matter how far he appeared to move away from his evangelical sermon of 1858, Dalziel argues, “its three main points remain the ‘central preoccupations’ of his life: the emphasis “on the law as curse, on suffering, and on the saving force of love” (13). Dalziel concludes that Hardy the ‘atheist’ remained “profoundly Christian” in many ways.

For James Townsend, Hardy’s Biblical knowledge can only be matched with that of a refined theologian. According to him, “Hardy was steeped in classical and biblical literature...was virtually a walking Bible concordance! Indeed, I would pit Hardy against any seminary graduate today” (Par.7). In the same light, Desmond Hawkins posits that Hardy “was more certainly influenced by the Bible than any novelist writing today” (Ibid). Townsend explains further that Hardy had considerable biblical background. His life-dream as a child was to be a parson. He played the violin in church as a youth, taught Sunday School and that his works are replete with scriptural allusions. Townsend does a statistical evaluation of the number of biblical allusions used in both his novels and poetry and realises that in his nine novels out of fourteen, there are 1516 general allusions and 518 specific allusions to the Bible. Meanwhile in his 947 poems, there are 212 general allusions and 147 specific allusions to the Bible. This gives a total of 1728 general allusions and 665 specific allusions. These statistics indeed reveal Hardy as a Bible scholar. In Townsend’s words, “Hardy’s thought-forms were often Bible-tinctured”.

One interesting thing or tragedy about Hardy is that as grounded as he was in the scriptures and theology, he later lost his faith. He couldn’t any longer sustain those same beliefs. The question, therefore, is - what happened to one who grew up dreaming of becoming a Christian minister and who read theology in preparation for that profession? This question rather points to the fact that Hardy is one of the most controversial writers of all times. And like Blake, he had mixed beliefs pattern that makes him one of the most misunderstood poets of his time. It also presents him as a man of double spirits who lived in a world of his own. In point of fact, Christian themes and images used in Hardy’s poetry do not only serve as evidence of doubt or rejection of God, but they portray on the one hand Hardy’s Christian orthodoxy and on the other demonstrate to the reader what human improvement looks like and how it can be achieved. In this vein, Jan Jedrzejewski explains that “Hardy’s attitude towards Christianity was far too complex to be described in terms of brief and generalised labels” (211). In his study of Hardy’s relationship with the Church, Jedrzejewski suggests that one way of understanding the complexities of Hardy’s views of the Church is to understand these views as changing and developing over his long lifetime. The basic trajectory shows Hardy gradually becoming more accepting of the Church’s role as a moral centre,

even if it is no longer a source of supernatural truth. This is especially true in the case of Christ as he appears in Hardy's poetry.

Hardy's presentation of idealistic dreams in "In Tenebris II" and other poems ultimately reveal what he does maintain as a viable source of hope, observable human actions. It is through his emphasis on observable conduct that Christ becomes an important figure to Hardy, as He not only serves as a symbol to inspire virtuous actions in others, but provides a historical example of the possibility and efficacy of human virtue. The good that is inherent in the Church even after the supernatural elements have been stripped from the faith is also apparent in "Apostrophe to an Old Psalm Tune," in which the speaker traces the presence of a psalm tune throughout his life. In the first stanza, he is a young and innocent church-goer:

I met you first – ah, when did I first meet you?  
When I was full of wonder, and innocent,  
Standing meek-eyed with those of choric bent,  
While dimming day grew dimmer  
In the pulpit-glimmer. (1-5)

Through the rest of the poem, the tune appears again in different settings and in different forms, serving as a source of stability through the speaker's changing life. The tune's role as a stabilising force is especially evident in the final stanza:

So, your quired oracles beat till they make me tremble  
As I discern your mien in the old attire,  
Here in these turmoiled years of belligerent fire  
Living still on – and onward, maybe,  
Till Doom's great day be! (31-35)

He again joins the critics in searching for this essence in "The Graveyard of Dead Creeds," in which he presents a picture of what is not essential. Hardy also expresses a wish to distinguish between the truths and the constructs of the Christian faith. His reference to Christ in "The Graveyard of Dead Creeds" superficially seems to suggest that Christ is one of the ineffective ideas that ought to be done away with, or at least adapted to suit the present state of the world. However, his view of Christ extends far beyond Christ's connection with the ineffectual creeds. Christ is at the centre of all four attempts to derive the essence of Christianity. Christ is the ultimate exemplar of the attempt, which Hardy demonstrates in the



poem "In Tenebris II" to accept the truths of the world, which become apparent through the human race's intellectual development in order to progress morally.

Hardy's deep interest in Jesus as a "famous personage" arises in several of his poems. The most often-discussed of these is his long poem "Panthera," in which he retells a legend that appears in various writings, as he points out in the heading of his poem, including the writings of Origen, the Talmud, the Apocryphal gospels, and Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. The presence of Christ in several of Hardy's poems has a similar function, as various aspects of the life and work of Christ provide significant images for understanding Hardy's more general view of human life. As a powerful representative of truth and goodness, as well as a reminder of both the presence of suffering and of the hope for some type of moral redemption for humanity, the figure of Christ becomes an important means of understanding Hardy's own thoughts concerning these matters. Being against the church doesn't mean the same as being against Christ or God. After all, Jesus chased away unscrupulous men who turned the house of God to a market place.

As seen in several important poems in which Christ appears, his activity during his life provides a guide for thinking about human moral progress, not only by a reliance on his teachings, but by a reliance on the aspects of his life that have emerged over time as universal images of virtue and truth, and a hope in the possibility of other "Christs" emerging throughout history to continue to establish virtue and truth. This does not mean that Hardy easily accepts every idea attached to the figure of Christ. Hardy raises the problematic idea of resurrection in his poem "A Drizzling Easter Morning," in which he sets aside his unbelief in the miraculous in order to consider what the idea of Christ's literal resurrection means for the world in the tumultuous and wearying state in which he perceives it. However, the importance of Christ as a positive image is particularly apparent in "Unkept Good Fridays".

There are many more Good Fridays  
Than this, if we but knew  
The names, and could relate them,  
Of men whom rulers slew  
For their goodwill, and date them  
As runs the twelvemonth through.  
These nameless Christs' Good Fridays,  
Whose virtues wrought their end,

Bore days of bonds and burning.

This poem, read alongside “A Drizzling Easter Morning,” indicates an important distinction in Hardy’s thought between two crucial moments in the life of Christ: to Hardy, Good Friday is of much greater importance than Easter Morning. As a historical human being, whose life on the earth continues to have profound significance in the modern world, Christ’s death functions as the truly important symbol, as it marks Jesus himself as a historical figure who has died for the sake of virtue, and establishes him as the most important symbol of other humans who have died the same type of death.

Like Meredith’s lasting works, it is the works of Christ which Hardy finds to be the meaningful and lasting aspects of Christ’s life. Thus, the symbol of Good Friday is more positive and helpful to Hardy than the symbol of Easter, because the focus of Good Friday is the definitive action of Christ’s life, which, in Hardy’s un-miraculous worldview, is the truly important part of Christ’s significance.

Hardy’s assertion that man can only bear living on “this wailful world” with the aid of a “mercy-seat” suggests a latent consciousness of sin and judgment which nothing on earth can resolve. A supernatural force seems necessary to provide a means to deal with these issues, which leads to the creation of God. Here, Hardy seems to regain his lost faith in God and believes that something in the form of a mercy seat is required for man to atone for sin and regain salvation. “God’s Funeral” is an attempt to describe the impact on humanity of a decline in a belief in God. Bailey points out that Hardy was disappointed that this poem was received as an attack on religion. He intended it as “an attempt to point toward a faith acceptable to the twentieth century” (287). Hardy in this poem, therefore, intended to demonstrate the extent to which the spirit of the twentieth century man rejected God, and not what he holds about God as an individual. Hardy was acutely aware of that gnawing something in human nature that seeks fulfilment, which it cannot find in the intellectual or physical realm of existence.

In the same strength, the poem “Survival” indicates that even at the age of eighty-one, in spite of his professed agnosticism, Hardy’s philosophy of life retains recognisably Christian elements. The poem serves as an example of Hardy’s tendency to judge life, also his own, according to Christian principles. It takes the form of a dialogue between Hardy and his inner man and is a reflection on the Biblical principles of truth and justice (Philippians 4.8), long-suffering, love and the all encompassing importance of charity (Corinthians 13.4,7,13). Hardy valued these principles and incorporated them in his theory of meliorism and in the characters of Angel

Clare's father and Tess. Yet, on measuring his own life against them he admits to falling short. In "Channel Firing", the mention of 'forty years' reminds the reader of the forty days John the Baptist spent preaching in the wilderness (Luke 3:1-20). It also echoes Jesus' forty days fast which He carried out in preparation for his ministry. This poem basically evokes the idea of the last judgement in the book of revelation, where at the sound of the trumpet, both the dead and living shall appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give accounts of their lives:

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books...And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:11-14)

### **Conclusion**

Blake and Hardy appear to have calved out an existential sphere of their own, where no one seems to understand them. Andrew M. Cooper states that "Blake occupies an often ambiguous borderline between the divine madness of inspiration, and the demonic madness of incapacity and false or fruitless labour, a madness of irrationality, slavery, and compulsive repletion" (585). Largely speaking, it is pretty difficult to put a finger on what Blake concretely believes because of his tendency to paint a picture of the divine from his personal experience. He appears to move in and out of the spiritual realm, especially, in his claim of communicating with angels. His rejection of the conventional approach to both the Bible and God complicate matters the more. Similarly, Hardy defied innovations that were taking place in the literary landscape and entered into a world of his own. Louise Dauner argues in this light that Hardy "remained consistent with his own individuality" (359). Perhaps on this point, Harvey's comments describe better, Hardy's uniqueness, when he says "Hardy wryly defines his own sense of alienation from the modern world, with its illusory promises of purpose, action and progress, in that splendid visionary poem, "Old Furniture" (12). According to Harvey it is a deeply personal poem in which Hardy, acknowledges that "the world has no use for one today/ Who eyes things thus — no aim pursuing!" but at the same time, "asserts the absolute value of his own mode of vision" (12). This may therefore explain why the term 'Agnostic' appears to be inappropriate to describe the two poets, especially, Hardy, for whom the expression is sometimes used. According to *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, "To be an agnostic is to hold that nothing can be known or at least that it is very unlikely that anything will be known or soundly believed concerning whether God or any

transcendent reality or state exists" (18). Generally, Hardy can neither be styled as a committed Christian nor as an atheist. Even his description as an agnostic still appears inadequate to describe the existential views of the most controversial writer in English literary history.

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