

William Blake was a visionary writer, painter, engraver and artist of 19th century who is regarded as a seminal figure of the Romantic Age. His writings have influenced countless writers and artists through the ages, and he has been deemed both a major poet and an original thinker.

Earth's Answer

Earth's Answer is a poem from his larger collection called Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience (published 1794). It is the response to the previous poem in The Songs of Experience - Introduction (Blake, 1794). In the Introduction, the bard asks the Earth to wake up and claim ownership.

Explanation

In the first stanza, Earth has been personified and it expresses feelings of grief and resentment. The statement, 'Her light fled' explains a state of gloominess and melancholy. Light is a symbol of enlightenment, growth and hope. It metaphorically represents beauty and creates imagery of a brighter more illuminated Earth. **Her light fled: Stony dread!**

And her locks cover'd with grey despair. Personification again portrays the Earth in human form specially as she is given her hair locks, and it represents that Earth is ancient and she is dying.

I hear the Father of the ancient men. "I" narrates the person in 1st person making it more personal for the speaker which then engages the reader. The expression of the words as **Starry Jealousy and Cruel, jealous, selfish fear** reveal us that earth has been a victim of vile emotions. It has been exploited by selfish men. Earthly people have not kept earth a happy and positive place.

Selfish father of men! The use of exclamation mark displays the emotion that Earth is feeling and creates the ominous atmosphere. This gives the idea that people are chained because of their own negative emotions.

Chain'd in night. Night is a metaphor for evil, as darkness is often associated with evil.

In the second last stanza, it says, **Does spring hide its joy?** This emphasizes that earth could have been a metaphor for women. Spring season and growth of blossoms is a virtue of mother earth. In parallel, Women also conceive children.

Another meaning could be that making love and intimacy should be normalized and made free from taboos.

That free Love with bondage bound.

The overall theme of this is that Human beings are suffering in the world due to the presence of negative feelings, jealousy and selfishness, which inhibit pure thought and pure Love. They have been exploiting Earth for their benefits, i.e., its resources for instance.

The poem also stands for cruelty against women in metaphorical terms. The whole poem could be interpreted as a metaphor for women oppression and the text outlines the unjust and cruel manner in which women are treated. The poem is narrated in first person by "Earth" and portrays men as dark, selfish, jealous and cruel and that men have imprisoned the **Earth which is metaphorically representing women.**

Analysis and Interpretation

Earth is traditionally personified as female (as in the expression, 'Mother Earth') because it gives life to vegetation and produces food by which humankind lives.

Bondage – Terms of confinement echo through the poem – 'Prison'd', 'Chain'd', 'heavy chain', 'bondage' and 'bound'. This reflects Earth's perspective that she is confined to the darkness because God is wantonly cruel and selfishly fears what Earth might achieve if released from his control. There is no recognition that the darkness and bondage is a consequence of human actions, over which God weeps. According to Christian understanding, it is human rebellion which has opened the way for death and decay.

Procreation – the Earth complains that the natural progress for the 'virgins of youth' towards 'free Love' is hindered by the darkness. The images of nature coming to fruition – 'bud' turning into 'blossom', seed being sown for an eventual harvest, after the land has been 'plow[ed]' are symbolic of sexual activity.

In Christian tradition, earth is connected to the physical existence of humans, since, according to the creation narrative in Genesis 2:7, 'Adam was made from the dust of the earth'. In this poem, Earth believes she is the prisoner and victim of a jealous God. According to Blake, this is a consequence of the Fall. However, Blake's perspective on the Fall is not the conventional one. He believed that:

It results in people having a divided inner state.

They project all their negative fears and instincts outward into an image of a tyrannical God. This image of God forbids the expression of human instincts and emotions.

Thus, their bodies become dead prisons to them rather than means of communication and relationship with others and source of pleasure.

Blake believed that humans are essentially spiritual beings and that the body should be an expression of a person's spiritual nature. Yet, he believes that people do not believe this. They believe that their bodies are purely physical and that reality consists solely in what can be understood via the senses. In this way their senses trap them in a materialist approach to life and they are unable to experience themselves, including their bodies, as spiritual beings. This seems to be the entrapment against which Earth protests. The earth is personified as a woman in distress. Earth rejects the call of the Bard because she sees God only as a tyrannical figure. This tyrannical rule prevents earth from full expression of her joy and fertility; it prevents the realisation of true love.

Literary Devices

Alliteration - The repeated use of the 'd' sound accentuates the heavy, solemn tone.

head', darkness', dread', drear', fled', cover'd', despair' – of the opening stanza.

Metaphor/personification/Anthropomorphism - The elaborate form of personification in this poem, along with the imagery and its associations, allows Blake to express complex metaphysical and theological issues, of the Fall of Man from Grace and Good, in an apparently straightforward way.

Hyperbole - The figure of "Earth" here, might be loosely interpreted as the representative of Experience itself, but more widely as temporal physical existence.

Form

There are 5 stanzas with 5 lines in each stanza. Iambic Trochaic meter has been used. The rhyme scheme is ABAAB CDCCD DEFFE. The monosyllabic endings to the majority of lines throughout the poem create a solemn tone. Lines 3 and 4 in each stanza read like half-lines, with two stresses per line. The need to pause between lines slows and emphasizes them. This intensifies the impression of stern lament. The rhyme scheme matches that of the Introduction, providing a reply in form as well as in content.