Rousseau's Cure for the Tyger's Affliction

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Romantic writers, living in an era of complete political and societal turmoil, often critiqued current social systems through their literary works. In his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, William Blake juxtaposed "The Lamb" with "The Tyger" to portray the corrosion of virtue through harsh experiences, a common occurrence during a time of rampant poverty, degeneracy, and corruption. Jean Jacques Rousseau suggests a solution to this growing problem in his educational treatise, *Emile*; he claims that isolation from the vulgar parts of society is the best and only way to raise citizens of higher moral quality, and so, children should be educated in this way alone. Similarly, as the Creature suffers greatly due to education's absence, the effect of education on human development plays a vital role in the plot of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* Instead of protecting a child completely from the corruption of society as Rousseau does in his *Emile*, Shelley casts her own creation out into the wilderness, exposing him entirely to the wickedness of humanity. Effectively abandoned by his neglectful father, the Creature matures independently from society and evolves a tendency towards hatred and villainy completely on his own. Without the shelter of education to preserve his moral character, the Creature witnesses firsthand how easily negative experiences defile what little innocence he had. A victim of selfish idealism, the Creature is not given the same tools that Emile is to survive in this brutish world and suffers greatly as a result. Thus, the intent of the creator or tutor intensely impacts the disposition of the creation or student.

By placing "The Lamb" next to the "The Tyger" in his work, Blake poignantly displays the way in which experience corrupts the innocence of naivete. In the former, the speaker of the poem firmly states, "Little Lamb God bless thee," emphasizing how perfection has been reached through the manufacture of this creature (Line 19, "The Lamb" Blake). Utilizing exultant diction to describe the Lamb, such as how he is a "bright" animal full of "delight," Blake invokes an

ideal image of complete contentedness and bliss (Line 5-6, “The Lamb” Blake). God, the creator of all species of life on Earth, has blessed this specific animal with unique purity, allowing him to enjoy his days free of any dark thoughts or moments of unhappiness. Because the Lamb possesses this freedom and fulfillment, he is arguably the zenith of creation. However, the Lamb’s counterpart, the Tyger, could not be more different from this pure, child-like creature. Where the Lamb is kind, the Tyger is malevolent; where the Lamb is innocent, the Tyger is wicked. The creator of the Lamb must also be the creator of the Tyger, so a logical inquiry would be as to how such a vast discrepancy in the disposition of these two beings could possibly exist.

To answer this query, Blake argues that the culprit of such a phenomenon lies solely in experience. Utilizing significantly more rhetorical questions in this second poem, Blake begs, “in what distant deep or skies. / Burnt the fire of thine eyes?” (Line 5-6, “The Tyger” Blake). The Tyger, as a function of the exchanges he has with the outside world, loses the purity and happiness that the Lamb so easily maintains and replaces them with his new sinister nature. Something the Tyger witnessed caused this descent into disillusionment, perhaps the inhumanity of forced child labor or the brutality of impoverished people fighting in the streets for scraps of bread — events Blake saw every day. Those who encounter evil have a tendency of continuing the cycle of darkness, allowing the atrocities they have seen to ruin their formerly benevolent disposition. No longer can the Tyger enjoy the small miracles of the world in the way that the Lamb can, for his perspective has been tarnished by this new awareness of evil. Blake represents this effect of experience not only through darker diction, but also the rhyme scheme of the poem itself. In order to maintain the rhyme, the reader of the poem must mispronounce the word “symmetry,” so that it rhymes with “thy” earlier in the line. Like a cacophony contrasted against a symphony, this rhyme is far less appealing and consistent than that of “The Lamb.” The perfect

harmony of the first poem is broken in the second, portraying the disruptive, impure nature of the Tyger when compared to the Lamb. Emphasizing the detrimental effect experience has on an individual, Blake displays how wickedness can be crafted from a formerly innocent personality.

Through the thought experiment he conducts in *Emile*, Rousseau provides a possible solution to this problem highlighted by Blake. In Rousseau's assessment, preserving virtue should be the first priority of education, and thus, complete removal and separation from the vice of other men is necessary to achieve this aim. In other words, an isolationist education is the only way to prevent Lambs from becoming Tygers. He asserts that education should "teach him [man] to preserve himself as a man" in the face of unknown obstacles and challenges that the world presents (Rousseau 42). Maintaining one's moral character despite the cruel experiences the world offers requires lessons of strength, integrity and maturity that are best given by a tutor such as the one Rousseau describes. Obedience with fortitude, resilience with empathy, Emile's tutor focuses on developing Emile's mind free of the negative influences that come from the wickedness of the outside world, while directly preparing him for full immersion within it. Consequently, the "furnace" and the "anvil" that once crafted the Tyger's dark disposition, experience, has been replaced by the tutor in the case of Emile (Line 14-15, "The Tyger" Blake). Because Emile's tutor individually picks the experiences that craft Emile's mindset, he is solely responsible for the way he perceives the world, not experience. Dark experiences cannot harm Emile in his developmental years because of this immunizing education he receives, and so, he can discern the best way to handle himself without the veil of disillusionment clouding his vision. Instead of allowing the twisting of his heart, the tutor "harden[s] [Emile's] bod[y] against the intemperance of seasons" (Rosseau 47). Armed with this unique mindset, Emile possesses a huge advantage over those who fail to be endowed with such sophisticated maturity. Thus,

Rousseau has allowed the tutor to usurp the role of experience in developing the human mind in this completely contained environment, better readying him for life in a harsh, brutish landscape.

Though the effectiveness of this type of education could be debated, the more important query lies in the intent behind it. In the last stanza of "The Tyger," Blake poignantly changes the line of questioning from who "could" create the Tyger to who would "dare" to create such a being (Line 24 "The Tyger" Blake). This exceptionally significant change in diction proves an integral idea in Blake's work: the choice to create a Tyger, when a Lamb could just have easily been made, displays an intense selfishness within the Creator. Though experience ultimately may be responsible for the newfound wickedness of the Tyger, his creator built him in a way that made him vulnerable to such detrimental forces. This powerful individual made the conscious choice to push the boundaries of what was good to see the extent of his own wicked power, without caring for the consequences of those actions. Consistent with themes of *Frankenstein*, Victor's visionary idealism forces the creation of a being that would have been better off not existing. Victor's main motivation for this scientific endeavor is so that "a new species would bless [him] as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to [him]" (Shelley 33). Never does Victor even consider how he should treat his creation; his entire focus is spent on the cultivation of his own influence, greedily enjoying the process of exploring his own power. Evidently, the Creator's desire to explore the capabilities of his own power is prioritized above the wellness of the being that he "dares" to create. In striking contrast, the sole purpose of Rousseau's educational treatise is to describe how to educate pupils in a way that best prepares them for interaction with the outside world. Rousseau's motive is the formulation of better members of society in order to improve the quality of everyone's lives while Victor's motive is solely selfish ambition. This difference in purpose between these two different

creators greatly represents their relative characters, as well as intensely impacts the lives of their creations.

Thus, though Rousseau's type of education could benefit society as a whole, the fact remains that very few people would ever be able to receive Emile's education. Whatever the constraint may be, time, money, or other resources, there is no way to create a society full of citizens who all have been gifted with as intensive and thorough of an education as Emile has been. Though completely exposing vulnerable children to the darkness of society is definitely deserving of reproach, harsh experiences are unavoidable, and so, it is impossible to immunize all children from their detrimental effects. However, just because full immunization is improbable does not mean that every child is doomed to become a Tyger. Perfection is inevitably unattainable, but there must be another way to purify society of the majority of these social issues so that the world is a much safer and more pleasant place to live. Like most other solvable issues, the solution lies not in lofty thought experiments or egalitarian aspirations, but in a commitment to individual responsibility. Perhaps we should teach children why these problems exist in the world, and the ways in which we can actually solve them, not just ignore them. A new curriculum needs to be crafted, with ideas of compassion, civility, and tolerance composing its majority, ideas that most definitely could be made use of today. Through resilient effort and dedication to morality, individuals can create a more humane world, perhaps even one that only a visionary idealist could dream of. Thus, the best immunization from the atrocities of the world comes from the knowledge, and the hope, that better possibilities exist.