

## William Blake Student Seminars

*part of*  
Each student will "teach" to the class one of the William Blake poems listed below. The content of the presentation will be expected to address the following aspects of the poem.

- **The thematic intent of the poem.** Do not give us a list of "themes" without explaining how they are developed. If a poem is about killing a fly, do not, for example, simply say that the theme of the poem is "murder" then leave it at that. I hesitate to call "thematic intent" the "message" of the poem because you will probably find that some poems communicate contrary messages. (Maybe this ambiguity *is* the message, but you would have to present a convincing argument for why it would be.) In other words, what is the point of the poem? What is Blake trying to tell us?
- **The unfolding of the poem.** When a poet writes a poem, he or she generally assumes that a reader will begin reading it from the first word, then move forward in a linear fashion to the end. The worst way to read a poem is to fixate on a particular line or stanza and make that the whole poem. Clearly, the poet has organized the materials of the poem in a particular order so that what the poem communicates slowly unfolds, develops, or becomes complicated. You need to address why the materials of the poem are organized in the manner in which they appear.
- **Diction.** Once you have figured out what it is Blake is trying to tell us in the poem, you will need to offer some conjecture into why he chose the particular words he did to say what he wanted to say. What poetic effect does he seem to be trying to achieve? Some vocabulary clarification for the class will probably be necessary at times.
- **Poetic devices.** Let me be clear: I do *not* want a checklist of metaphors, similes, puns, allusions, and so forth. Poetic terms are there to provide you with a more precise vocabulary when discussing diction. They are also there to help you describe other aspects of the poems that do not directly pertain to diction, such as meter, rhyme scheme, and the length of lines and stanzas. Again, what poetic effect does Blake seem to be trying to achieve?
- **The voice of the poem.** Do not assume that poems written in the first person are intended to represent the voice of Blake. Many poems employ a persona, and those that seem to be in third person nevertheless may communicate a particular point of view. Be attentive to the question of whose eyes the poem filters experience through.
- **Intertextuality.** Many of the Blake poems we will be examining make use of other Blake poems. Some even have the same titles. What is the relationship between the poem you are examining and its counterpart, if it has one? Does it develop, complicate, or contradict its counterpart's message? Students will only be expected to address this question with respect to poems already discussed in class.