

## INSANITY AND MYSTICISM IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S POETRY

Neeraj Vishwakarma<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Saheen Saulat<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore (MP)<sup>2</sup>Supervisor, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore (MP)

## ABSTRACT

*This study's objective is to demonstrate, through meticulous analysis, how William Blake infused mysticism into the many poems that are contained within Songs of Innocence and Experience. These poems are part of the collection Songs of Innocence and Experience. Blake is of the opinion that this life has no value in this world, but that it will become everlasting after death, despite the fact that this life has no value in this world. This conviction is communicated by him in the context of the word "mysticism." When a person passes away, a soul is born into the world. Only human beings are responsible for their actions and the consequences that come as a direct result of those actions. A wide range of authors contributed to the canon of works of literature that were extracted in their entirety for the purpose of this investigation. The collection of poems titled Songs of Innocence and Experience by John Keats is the focus of this study, which studies and analyses the use of mystical elements within those songs. The individuals who read the study paper that he wrote on such a subject as Blake's outstanding holy poetry and that he conducted himself is a source of energy and curiosity for them.*

**Keywords:** Mysticism, Innocence, Poetry.

All prophecies are fragile and open to debate and error. Those who believe a false prophet are crazy. However, the key issue is how to make sense of prophecy's cryptic language. Is this the language of madness, of the unspoken, of the visual? These are important issues to ask when analysing the prophetic poetry of William Blake. His premonitions and visions gave his poetry a vitality, passion, and depth that beyond its literal interpretation. According to Blake, the prophet Elijah appeared to him in visions (among other visions). Was Blake, then, completely oblivious? Without a doubt, Blake had a mental disorder. No one can deny the widespread interest in his sudden change in disposition, his gloom, and his laser-like, energised productivity. The impact of his inventive poetry, however, should not be diminished because of his mental affliction. Alternatively, does it improve upon it in any way? If we don't adequately discuss mysticism, we won't have satisfactory answers to these questions. As a follower of Emmanuel Swedenborg's enigmatic religious teachings, Blake was a mystic in his own right. Blake is best understood by considering the relationship between madness and mysticism. It shows that the person's dedication to the imaginative, spiritual, and reflective shows that their lunacy was not a sign of a natural decline in their mental faculties.

Speculation and the possibility of insanity were both early concerns for Blake. His father was a

dedicated admirer of Emmanuel Swedenborg, from whom Blake took his interest in the philosopher. The Swedish physicist and theological philosopher Swedenborg. After claiming in 1747 that he had gained familiarity with the inner nature of humans thanks to a vision that had occurred in 1745, he abandoned his scientific studies. He's been plagued by these dreams for decades now. Further, he claimed to be in touch with angels. He claimed to have heard the explanations straight from God, and published critical interpretations of texts in the Bible. Swedenborg did not have a strong allegiance to any religious group, and he did not consider his ideas to be unique to any one religion. In Swedenborg's view, the Second Coming would be heralded by the appearance of a New Jerusalem on Earth. Paradise, if it exists at all, would be located here on Earth. Blake has never wavered in his convictions. His earliest poems, like "There Is No Natural Religion" and "All Religions Are One," were influenced by this idea. To paraphrase Blake, whatever was divine in God must be divine in man. Although Blake was only a little boy when he first learned these concepts from his parents, he soon began to have dreams and engage in meaningful conversation with the supernatural.

with the Holy Virgin Mary, the Archangel Michael, and other figures from history and religion to discuss their thoughts. He might be easily identified by such out-of-character actions. Ever since he completed his engraving apprenticeship, Blake's

personality has been polarising. He insisted on becoming not just a mystic or prophet but also a political radical. Thomas Paine, author of the influential pamphlet *Common Sense*, was a close friend, as was William Goodwin, a British anarchist who influenced the likes of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley. Blake's poetry was also frequently political (see his prophetic writings on France and America) and legendary (*The Book of Urizen* and *The Song of Los*). His engravings garnered the same strange and unorthodox reception. Most of his poems, and those of contemporary poets, are complemented by these engravings. For other canonical works, including Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, he provided engravings. Because he thought they were founded on error or superstition, Blake attacked long-held beliefs and established institutions.

Even after his death, Blake's work was not fully appreciated or understood. After 1818, he finally had some supporters. There was no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something about the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott, as one of his followers put it after his death. All of Blake's feelings and thoughts, in all their complexity, are reflected in his poetry. It's a lot to take in and understand. Poems in both the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* strike a nice balance, making for some of the most illuminating verses. There is a strong intersection between mysticism and madness in these poetries. Blake's meditative musings on the invigorating potential of the mind, dreams, and visions of the spirit can be found in his collection *Songs of Innocence*. The *Songs of Experience* elucidates, without a trace of ambiguity, why the human, as opposed to the mystical, the intuitive, rather than the rational, is what is truly required. The tigers of fury are wiser than the horses of instruction, Blake argues in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." Blake's heavenly visions inspired a plethora of religious imagery in his poems. These symbols also carry religious and mystical connotations. Blake's mysticism has romantic overtones, as shown in "The Divine Image," a poem from *Songs of Innocence*. Furthermore, he considers what this means for mankind going forward.

*To Mercy Pity Peace and Love, All pray in their  
distress:*

*And to these virtues of delight Return their  
thankfulness.*

*For Mercy Pity Peace and Love, Is God our father  
dear:*

*And Mercy Pity Peace and Love, Is Man his child  
and care.*

*For Mercy has a human heart Pity, a human face:  
And Love, the human form divine, And Peace the  
human dress.*

*Then every man of every clime, That prays in his  
distress,*

*Prays to the human form divine Love Mercy Pity  
Peace.*

*And all must love the human form, In heathen, turk  
or jew.*

Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell There God is dwelling too. (Blake, "The Divine Image", 111)

Blake attributes divine qualities to both God and humanity in this poem: mercy, pity, peace, and love. These divine characteristics reveal what God values most in the creatures He made. Blake, following Swedenborg's idea, thinks that man has within him the potential for obtaining the divine without the help of the supernatural. If a man is in harmony with his own spiritual energies, he can achieve divinity. It's also crucial that these abilities have some sort of divine, untainted connection. It's not hard to see why, given Blake's history of visions, he would regard this idea as divine.

His madness could be explained, in this view, by his deep identification with the transcendental potential of his own life. Simply put, he is a divinely-realizable free spirit. Blake's spiritual philosophy is one of purity, compassion, and love, as shown in the poem. It's more than just a display of Christian generosity. It's an encouragement to know one's own creative abilities inside and out. *Songs of Experience* presents a wide range of spiritual expressions. Not only does the poem's otherworldly visitor provide wisdom to Blake, but so does the harshness and filth of real life.

*I Dreamt a Dream! what can it mean? And that I  
was a maiden Queen: Guarded by an Angel mild;  
Witless woe, was ne'er beguil'd! And I wept both  
night and day And he wip'd my tears away And I  
wept both day and night*

*And hid from him my hearts delight So he took his  
wings and fled:*

*Then the morn blush'd rosy red:*

*I dried my tears & armd my fears, With ten  
thousand shields and spears. Soon my Angel came  
again:*

*I was arm'd, he came in vain: For the time of  
youth was fled And grey hairs were on my head.*

(Blake, 'The Angel', 124-5)

Now we must ask: who or what is the Angel? It's a perfect metaphor for Blake's prescient visions. This is a really rough situation. Even when the Angel runs away, the poet is prepared for his return. The transformation of the narrator is unmistakably the poem's central theme. The opening few stanzas present a young, unsure narrator. The words "and hid from him my heart's happiness" come right before the Angel's departure for a reason. Pride prevents the recipient from giving the Angel his or her "heart's delight," and as experience is gained, the Angel is no longer necessary. Having "armed my worries," the narrator finally stops sobbing. The reappearance of the Angels, however, has made the speaker realise that his or her pride has only served to fuel the terror that was once intolerable. The Angels' final mission was not to save or defend the storyteller, but rather to make this "maiden Queen" ready to meet her end.

This poem was intended to be an allegory on chastity, but its exploration of the cycle of birth and death reveals a sexuality that is even more intriguing. Blake favoured unrestricted sexuality. He thought it was dishonest to try to hide people's sexuality. Angel represents the rejected suitor in this poetry about a virgin queen. She suppresses and represses her own wants. Since she is mortally ill, the Angel's return at death is ultimately futile. From the poet's perspective, human beings should not go through life trying to stifle their natural urges, but rather to let them free. According to him, the purpose of spirituality is to liberate the senses so that human beings might have direct contact with infinity. Mysticism, then, differentiates itself from the authoritarian tendencies of religion in this way. The physical and the spiritual are equally important to mysticism. The holy and the physical are both celebrated in Blake's mystical worldview. For a complete understanding of life, one needs both experience and innocence. It's impossible to have one without the other, as one is a crucial part of completing and comprehending the other. Because of this, the poet never worried about becoming crazy. It made perfect sense to him to have a sensual or bodily encounter with the holy.

Blake's "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" is a prose poem that contains extensive discussions on such topics. Blake uses this poem to challenge commonly held beliefs about religion and God's place in society. What is suggested by the Songs of Innocence and Experience's framework is brought

out here in a way. The poet's goal in these poems is to expose the boundless potential latent in every human being by elucidating the duality of human nature. Blake defends the infinite in man in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" as a counter to the authoritarian debate between religion and science. Blake describes his conversations with the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel in the excerpt provided. Isaiah spoke up. The voice of honest wrath is the voice of God, and as I was then persuaded, and remain confirmed, of this, I gave no thought to the repercussions and wrote without stopping to consider them.

"Then I asked: does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so?"

"He replied. All poets believe it does, & in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything." (Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", 186)"

Without really seeing God, Isaiah is nonetheless sure of God's calling to him because he recognises the infinite in "everything." Isaiah recognises that this influence may be fictitious, but he did not prepare himself for the fallout of having witnessed a psychopath. Basically, he just wrote down the information he had. Anything that could have stymied his spiritual development was swept aside by the force of his conviction and argumentation. An experience of the mystical transcends clear distinctions between sanity and insanity, fact and fiction. Whatever we accept as divine and are convinced of becomes our definition of the divine. The mystical encounter and ensuing spiritual development are assured once we are persuaded. A spiritual devotee's zeal can't be dismissed as wishful thinking. Blake says he saw Elijah, just like someone says they hear God's voice and are quite certain of it. Their resolve is unmovable. No one can challenge it because they are unaware of any evidence to the contrary. Knowing if the body tricks the mind or if it merely seduces the soul due to some flaw is crucial.

It is clear from the context of the quoted sentence from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" that the poet is making professional reference to his work as an engraver. Using acids and other corrosive substances, he drips paint onto a wooden or metal canvas, sculpts it into the proper shape, and then colours it in. Instead of using a chisel, he is using his hands to create his designs "But first, the idea

that man has a physical body separate from his soul must be eradicated. I plan to do this through printing using the infernal method, with corrosives—which are beneficial and healing in Hell—to dissolve superficial appearances and reveal the hidden infinity. Everything would look boundless to man if only the gates of perception could be cleared. Since the dawn of civilization, however, people have become increasingly insular,

to the point where they can only perceive the world outside via the cracks that form in their own skulls." This passage suggests that we have been duped, and that no one but ourselves is to blame. The poet reveals to us the infinite, which we had before hidden. Wordsworth, the greatest romantic poet, claims that William Blake is insane. Blake's mood swings, inconsistency, and visions are not indicative of insanity. They are his take on the mysterious underpinnings of existence.

#### REFERENCES

1. London Quarterly, III (1868), 265-311. Article on Blake. *Nation*, LXXV (November, 1902), 427. Notice of facsimile copy of Blake's illustrations of the Book of Job.
2. *Quarterly Review*, CXVII (January, 1865), 1-27. Review of Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*.
3. *Temple Bar*, XVII (July, 1866), 95-105. "William Blake: Seer and Painter." *Times Literary Supplement* (London), No. 1037 (December 1, 1921), pp. 777-78. "The Poetry of Blake."
4. *Times Literary Supplement* (London), No. 1050 (March 2, 1922), p. 138. Review of Geoffrey Keynes' *Bibliography of William Blake*.
5. *Times Literary Supplement* (London), No. 1072 (August 3, 1922), p. 510. Review of Allardyce Nicoll's *William Blake and His Poetry*.
6. Dawkins, Muriel Bachelor. "Mysticism: An Epistemological Problem" (Dissertation Yale University).
7. Miller, H. Crichton. *The New Psychology and the Preacher*. New York, 1924.
8. Nordau, Max. "Mysticism," *Degeneration* (New York, 1896), pp. 44-240.
9. Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*. Translated by John W. Harvey. London, 1923.
10. Royce, Josiah. *The World and the Individual*. New York, 1920. Sharpe, A. B. *Mysticism: Its True Nature and Value*. London, 1910. <http://www.litkicks.com/Blake/>