

William Blake as a Visionary Poet

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AGE OF WILLIAM BLAKE: William Blake, the greatest visionary poet in English lived through a crucial phase of Western History. Among the major events, he witnessed were the American Revolution of 1776 that secured American independence from the British rule. Blake's period can be seen to have witnessed an eventful time in the history of England. The changing economic set up emerging from the industrial growth brought about an entire and fast revolution in the life of the people. The onset of the Industrial Revolution made Blake aware of how the overall economy of the country was changing and particularly of how social life was become increasing subservient to the demands of wage-labor and the new rules of life enjoyed by the factory system. He viewed this as well as several tendencies of his time as an attempt to restrict human capacity and the freedom of imagination. He also saw his role as contributing to the reinstatement to the imagination as the guiding principle of human affairs.

BLAKE THE ROMANTIC: William Blake is considered as a precursor of Romantic Movement in English Literature. Romanticism laid considerable stress on the elements of imagination, nature worship, humanitarianism, liberty, mysticism and symbolism which differed from the outlook of Neo-classicism which promoted the nation of reason, balance and logic, Blake always saw immediate events against a far wider and deeper background. In his staunch glorification of the imagination, in his revolt against the bondage and restrictions that society and its institutions imposed on the individual man, in his mysticism and his symbolic interpretation of thought and feeling and his simplicity of expression indeed make Blake a harbinger of Romantic poetry in England. Blake remained very much of his own man, _anti-classical, anti-official, he was self-taught an autodidact. His poetry attains a cosmic dimension in which individual battles are always seen as examples of a wider-perennial battle between the expanding force of energy and the restrictive, numbing, death-dealing force of reason. Blake believed poetry to be "dictated by spirits". Imagination and intuition were the dominant features of Romanticism and Blake's poems are undoubtedly enriched with it.

NATURE IN BLAKE: In Blake's poems, nature is associated with rejuvenating stimulants such as "the sound of the bell in the spring season and the merry voice of thrush and sparrow". The Nature in Song of Innocence Smells of Eden Where "sin is absent in man's conscience". The most characteristic feature of Blake's poems is that they are based on his 'vision' which are embedded with Angels, Gods and Goddesses and thus significantly, the poetic inspiration poetry itself becomes divine and sacred. Human instincts and impulses play a significant role in man's spiritual progress and Blake always speaks against laying down codes of prohibition against them. The poetic creed of William Blake is based on imagination.

BLAKE'S PHILOSOPHY: Blake's philosophy asserts, more than anything else, the contrariety of system with regard to human soul and the other objects of creation. Blake is a devout admirer of intrinsic energies and sublime instincts of human soul. According to him, any logical analysis of nature of universe thoroughly based upon science and reason is grievously misleading. In brief, "it is man's imagination which is eternal and everlasting"; only the world of imagination can bring about a world of order and beauty in which all perspectives of universe and the entire faculties of human soul fall into their own proper and fit order. Therefore, for Blake, it is to reveal the universal truth by the way of the poet's imagination or inner vision which is supreme and it is his criterion of versification. Moreover, Blake maintains that the objective of the poet is not to please and instruct or to provide a rational analysis of things but to reveal what is felt as true to the mind and imagination of the poet. Blake regards art not as an expression of the individual but as the representation of the eternal truth. Blake's eminence as a poet rests mainly on his Poetical Sketches and on his Songs of Innocence and Experience. These involve lovely lyrics and the visionary gleam which differentiate Blake from the eighteenth century poets and writers.

BLAKE'S CONCEPT OF RELIGION: Blake holds the old obsolete orthodox groundwork of religion that instructs its members to follow its oppressive principles and norms as deprecatory. Furthermore, he offers a radical and entirely novel meaning to the Christian concept of Devil, God and Heaven. For him, the voice of one's own conscience is more conspicuous than any other professed doctrine on God. Therefore he rejects the institutional set up of Clergies and Popes. Therefore, the essence of Blake's vision is normally pastoral which are engraved with Christian emphasis. The purity and felicity of his pastoral narration is effectively brought out in his Songs of Innocence but when the poet passes to Experience, this beauty is not completely eroded; it only collaborates beautifully with intellect.

Therefore, in S.T. Coleridge's words, it is Blake, who is "a man Genius". According to Arthur Symons, "Blake's poetry is the most abstract of all poetry, although in a sense the most concrete". Symons further adds, "Blake is the only poet who sees all temporal things under the form of eternity. "Besides, C.M. Bowra says than what Blake describes are not actual events as ordinary men see and understand them, but spiritual events which have to be stated symbolically in order that they may be intelligible. Finally, it is one of the most important and prominent figures of the twentieth century English Literature, T.S. Eliot, presents his views about William Blake by saying that Blake was endowed with a capacity for "considerable understanding of human nature, with a remarkable and original sense of language and the music of language, and a gift of hallucinated vision".

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