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## William Blake's Poetry- A Manifestation of Existential Mystic Expressions

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### Abstract

A fundamental aspect of our existence in life is to implore what it really means. We as humans strive for understanding the meaning, purpose of life. In today's world with the chaos surrounding us, we try to find meaning in the shared human experiences like, loss, alienation, disparity and misery, which are prevalent in the present times. Human existence has similarities without their essentially deriving from each other. This can particularly hold true in terms of ideas and experiences because there is essentially a fundamental unity of human mind. This paper aims at studying the mystical experiences expressed in the poetry of William Blake. We see that the mystical expressions of Blake are transformative yet conform to the worldly existence of humans. They exist in the present and are very much within the paradigms of the life we lead. Hence the purpose of this paper is to study the manifestation of existential mysticism in the poetry of William Blake. Mystics have across countries, ages, or regions, shown a tendency to describe common experiences in varied imagery yet led to the same universal truth which somehow eases the existential crises of humans.

**Keywords:** Mysticism in poetry, Existential mysticism, Mystic realism, William Blake poetry

### Introduction

William Blake possessed an unusual personality with an imaginative bent of mind. He turned to and was influenced by Emmanuel Swedenborg, Jacob Boheme, Paracelsus, St Augustine, revelations of St John the Divine, Plato, Aristotle, at an early age and occidental literature served as a stepping stone for him to further trod along the oriental system of thought. One can unmistakably trace the penetration of oriental influence in the profound mysticism of his thought and his elaborate symbolisms which were essentially mystic while adhering to the existential realities of the world.

In the early teens, as an artist, though he always kept busy with orders, his mind and eye bore adherence to his heavenly vision, while his thought was consecrated and

engrossed with the eternal truths. He whole heartedly embodies these truths in adequate form to convey their messages so that his thoughts could enter the minds and hearts of all while understanding and compassion grew in humanity. Blake was highly aware of the underprivileged. His mysticism arose from his surroundings, from where he lived. His mind could not bear any repression especially of those who were less. Poetry was not an acquired technique for Blake, rather it was the outpour of an exulted spirit, fervid, vital and aflame with a strong message for humanity which existed then and will exist forever. This study is going to delve deeply into the mystic that exists around us, which Blake has constantly brought out in his poetry. Such expression essentially eases and attempts the state of delirium that we are in existentially.

Mysticism in William Blake's poetry bore no rigid adherence to tradition, formalism or the law; however it turned to the eternal spring within the heart of each individual. It upheld the consummate worth of the human spirit and the spring that could be felt in the farthest corner of each heart. He believed in the all pervading divinity, an imminence of divine in all humanity and nature. His cosmos was depicted by him in his own symbol, yet with a sheer magnificence of portrayal, he could convey the mystical message to the world. He abhorred religious orthodoxy or religious dogmas and sought a spirituality which connected all the consciousnesses within the realms of this ephemeral world. His spiritual elevation arose from the strings of compassion in his heart for all humanity. Human according to him was an integral part of the energy of the cosmos and he amalgamated the microcosm with the macrocosm. The general sway of his poetry is defined in *The Way of the Mystic*

“Its aim is to know the truth; it denies the world and the sense reports of the world in order to seek reality.”  
(Underhill 10)

Blake's poetry adds an intense individualism and believes that there is always persistence of personality. For him the ultimate unity is truly a community. Our thoughts and courage may find a renewed vigour to wrestle with existence while trying to find joy as described by him in the ever present, all pervading infinitude.

“Distinguish therefore states from individuals in those states. States change, but Individual identities never change or cease.”  
(Blake, Jerusalem 529)

His ideas of spiritual harmony were revolutionary while mystic at the same time. He believed that man should be able to complete his human nature. It was the prerogative of man to be able to turn to the sources which could bring about fullness in this human nature. Curbing the innate nature of humans would be detrimental to his spiritual elevation. Free love, hence was not a taboo for him and he mystically expressed this essential existential need of mankind thus.

“When in Eternity Man converses with Man, they enter  
Into each other's bosom (which are universes of delight)  
In mutual interchange, and first their emanations meet  
Surrounded by their children; if they embrace and comingle”  
(Blake, Jerusalem 729)

Life for William Blake was not one of mere existence, devoid of any meaning, which ultimately would merge into oblivion. He believed that all through the earthly pilgrimage, there was a glory that emanated from the humans and their existence while affirming their eternal significance. For him there was this reality of the world which was more significant than the accidents of time or space, or any amount of comfort or fame. His world was one of spiritual understanding incessantly contemplating upon the meaning of existence and the plan of the universe. He believed in compassion to guide each action and he unflinchingly questioned each prevalent practice and religious orthodoxy. His mysticism arose from experiences within this world and it was immediately something universal which was not bound by any religion culture or race but was timeless and provided an elevated spiritual conjuncture for the seekers.

Blake gives affirmation to love as the essence of existence. He believes entire universe to be fortified by love in its infinitude. Man with his contradictions, as long as is loved and loves can forever be in a mystic bliss. In "The Lamb" Blake argues that love is manifest as the quintessential attribute of both man and the maker.

"He is called by thy name,  
 For he calls Himself a Lamb  
 He is meek, and He is mild  
 He became a little child.  
 I a child, and thou a lamb,  
 We are called by his name." (Blake, The complete Poetry and  
 Prose of Blake 9)

His influence of Boheme's "*De Signatura Rerum*" (Divine signatures in nature) and Paracelsus's theory of "*le principe de la medicine est l'amour*" (love is the medicine) is evident in the thought behind the concept of unity and one-ness between humans and the all-pervasive infinitude, the divine through the threads of love. William Blake believed in the interwoven connection of all the energies existing in the cosmos. For him the all-pervasive cosmic consciousness existed in all animate and inanimate matter which was the root of spiritual enlightenment within the existence in this world. His amalgam of the microcosm with the macrocosm is evident in Auguries of Innocence

"To see a world in a grain of sand,  
 And a Heaven in a wild flower,  
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
 And eternity in an hour." (Blake, Lyrical Poems  
 of Blake 138)

Blake's Mysticism exists in the reality around us. It is the effervescence of energy reflected in the details of life itself. One can see evidently how Blake uses nature to describe the oneness between man and the divine. The simplicity of pristine existence is what is truly mystic in "*The Echoing Green*":

The sun does arise,  
 And make happy the skies. The merry bells ring  
 To welcome the spring.  
 The skylark and the thrush,  
 The birds of the bush,

Sing louder around,  
To the bells of cheerful sound,  
While our sports shall be seen  
On the echoing green. (Blake, Songs of Innocence and  
of Experience 11)

William Blake as a mystic is united with his thoughts of love which are revolutionary and humane. They rise above the existential strife, the egoistic self and enlighten the mystic way within the real world. His thoughts conveyed through his poetry are mystic yet connect the present world and consummates it with the eternal object of love, the divine. He is highly sensitive to the problems that the world faces and the existential struggle of humans. He emotes passionately about the exalted values of life and this opens the experience of the eternal reality for him. He uses symbols to describe and convey the significance of his experiences which are at an elevated spiritual juncture while being very much a part of what is going on in the real world. His poetry portrays the oscillation between reality and the ideal reality described emotively by Blake and the state of bliss and pleasure he is in when there is no disparity between the self and the others. This unity is mentioned time and again as the thread that binds all the energies with the all pervasive.

In “*The Little Black Boy*”. He describes this unity regardless of the disparity of colour when he symbolically portrays God’s love for His creation. This poem shows the divine energy flowing through all and love emanating through unification of people. The essence of Blake’s mystic spiritualism within the paradigms of this world are depicted in the following lines:

“And we are put on earth a little space. That we may learn to bear the beams of  
love”

(Blake, The complete Poetry and prose  
of Blake,13)

Humans in their ideal state , when they can be in the spiritual juncture similar to the divine, according to Blake is when they amalgamate with the divine beyond the phantasmagoria of emotions which meld us with the realities of the world. Such a spiritual existence finds manifestation in a life advocated by Blake which is gracious, blessed, amiable, overflowing with compassion and kindness and thus forever united with the divine. Such a life leads to the ultimate realization of heightened spiritual truths within the existential realm. This finds reflection in the following lines from *Mercy Pity Peace and Love*:

“For mercy has a human heart, Pity a human face, And love the human form divine,  
and peace the human dress” (Blake, Poetry and Prose of  
William Blake 47)

William Blake found the echo of the mystic spirituality in the very world that he stayed in and he was forever conscious of the reality of eternal oneness that his symbols portray for us through his poetry. Jacob Boehme opines, “ He is a unique personality thrown out of the world of eternity into that of space and time to appear there for an instant and then return to his true dwelling space.” (Boheme,14)

We see in “*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*” there is a rapture of ecstasy in the heart of the child witnessing the world while awakening to its glory with a pure faith in its inherent loveliness. World, for Blake, was a manifestation of the eternal energy which is forever a source of delight and spiritual pleasure. “ Nowhere”, says

Swinburne," is found such a tender wisdom of holiness, such a delight and perfume of innocence. (Swinburne 126) For Blake there is a deeper note of mystical experience in " *The Divine Image*" where he believes mercy, pity, peace and love are the attributes of the divine energy and these are all essentially human qualities which can be found while existing within the world to ultimately reveal the divine within us:

" For, Mercy, Pity, peace and Love  
Is God our Father dear  
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
Is Man, His child and Care." (Blake, The complete Poetry and prose  
of Blake 12)

Another exquisite poem which eases the existential worries and dilemmas of the world while connecting it to the mystic realm is " *On Another's Sorrow*" It speaks of how kindness is also prevalent within and around us, in all our joys and sorrows. It soothes the desolate loneliness by comforting the presence of the divine all along within the existential journey:

"O! He gives to us His joy  
That our grief He may destroy  
Till our grief is fled and gone  
He doth sit by us and moan." (Blake, Lyrical Poems  
of Blake 52)

However in the *Songs Of Experience*, the period of experience comes with the realization of the laws of the world encasing the spirit in the shell of the mundane. However Blake's heart reflects his spiritual rapture and believes that disillusionment with the hardened experience is impossible to an enlightened soul that has tasted joy in all its fullness and purity. Even though Blake puts across two contrary states which are faced by each human in the existential journey, his poems assure us that though neither state can forcefully change the other, there is a definite holiness in everything and he reassures the infinitude of nature in his poem *Auguries of innocence*:

"Joy and woe are woven fine.  
A clothing for the soul divine;  
Under every grief and pine  
Runs a joy with silken twine.  
It is right it should be so  
Man was made for joy and woe  
And when this we rightly know  
Thro the world we safely go." (Blake, Lyrical  
Poems of Blake 139)

In this poem, Blake's spiritual mysticism in the existential state also caters to when reason usurps inspiration in the routine of the mundane existence of life and the soul is entrapped in darkness. He says:

"We are led to believe a lie  
When we see not through the eye  
Which was born in a Night to perish in a Night

When the soul slept in the Beams of Light”  
 (Blake, Lyrical Poems of Blake 141)

William Blake's mystical experiences are an active solution to the ultimate search for reality within the complexities of life. As Radhakamal Mukherjee says:

“Mysticism points eternal values such as Truth, Beauty and Goodness, which are all infinite, and which transcend all systems of human relations, but it finds these actualized in the concrete human situations and experiences. God as Truth safeguards society's pursuit of knowledge and broadens the horizons of human concepts, attitudes and affections.”(Mukherjee 9)

William Blake as a spiritual mystic assists the souls of humans to connect with a reality which is divine. He is a poet whose mystical experiences have been personal and makes his vision comprehensible with a perception which stretches beyond the material world, while he gains consciousness of this existence of divinity within the realms of the lives that we lead. His mysticism is not bound by an era or time; it is timeless with a vision of infinite eternity. His mystic fervor reaches beyond the conventional religious doctrines to seek the esoteric meanings and find resonance in his poetry. His motivation in poetry was more of a gnostic and spiritual concern wherein he helped people discover a higher true self. His inner world of visions was not bound by a physical reality yet he took ideals from this inner reality to comprehend and solve the intricacies of the world of matter. His mysticism stems from his personal mystical experiences which do not manifest in an inexplicably transcendental realm but in the daily conundrums of the life itself. Hence he gives insight into mystical revelations in his poetry which provide an understanding to navigate through this life while attaining spiritual heights. William Blake doesn't complicate the understanding of divine, albeit he makes us comprehend the Supreme within the context of our very existence.

While demystifying his mystic experiences, Blake unraveled the truth of the spiritual quest within the conflict and the complex structure of human life and society. Nanavutty believes has been influenced by “the Hindu conception of Samsara (mundane existence), which consists of discordant elements in opposition to one another” (Nanavutty 171). It is this revelation of mystic spiritual reality within the daily sustenance of life that elevates the poetry of William Blake.

### **Conclusion**

In Conclusion one can say that Blake makes us accustomed to the spiritual and mystical universe within our lives and the existential realm that we are in. Blake wants us to trust life to unfold the mystic truth and eternal enlightenment. Blake believes that despite the plurality of our existence and the contradiction of the world around, it is within the infinitude that the eternal humans live. They are one, unified with every aspect of the palpating life around us. He believes in mankind to live full extent including all the impulses, innovations, creativity and energies, while experiencing mystical bliss. According to him, developing a spiritual understanding and submerging the selfhood is able to create a spiritual bliss, a mystical rapture while easing the existential torment. He believes that within man lies the divine. Man is the universe and human personality is the reflection of infinity. The divine essence in man lies within his responsible free will and it is through this he can bring harmony in his existence in this world.

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