



William Blake: Poet of 'Varied Attributes' & his Lady character 'Ahania'

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Abstract

William Blake is quite a well-known name in English poetry. He is in fact the poet who plays a great role in joining the two main courses of poetry of the Eighteenth century, pastoral and moral, both. Born on 28th of November 1757 in London, he was not only a well-known poet but also a good painter, author, inventor, delineator, etcher, printer, colourist. All through his life, we find Blake as a committed poet as well as an exceptional artist. Some of his most acclaimed works include "All Religions are One", "Songs of Innocence", "Songs of Innocence and of Experience", "The Book of Urizen", "The Song of Los", "The Book of Los", "The Book of Ahania", "The Ghost of Abel", "The Pastorals of Virgil", "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" etc.

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Introduction

*"He who binds to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroy,
But he who kisses the joy as it flies,
Lives in Eternity's sunrise."*

-William Blake

Being England's one of greatly acclaimed imaginative, creative artist, Blake has shown his utmost touch and care towards his works by making them aspire to release the creative oomph and challenge the controlling of the handcuffed phoney psyche.

A parent always holds an important key that help in unlocking all the potential virtues that a child carries within. A parent can always inspire a child to develop more in a field that the child seems to be interested in. That is exactly what happened in the case of William Blake. His father James Blake could see the artistic qualities inside William at an early age and hence gave the child every opportunity that he could pay for. As a result of which we find William admitted to the Henry Par's drawing school at an early age of ten. Next when William attains the age of twelve, one finds him apprenticed to the engraver Basire, under whom he expands within himself a great desire, attraction towards the Gothic style in sculpture and architecture. Alongside with all these activities, Blake didn't forget to nurture his great poetic skills. His early writings got published, but privately, in the volume "Poetical Sketches", in 1783.

William Blake could never afford a living from his own works, which was too murky for the public to notice. Under the shade of William Butts he could find sufficient works, etching for other writers. In his visionary poems, such as *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake continued his expression of spiritual and creative nature. Many of Blake's contemporaries took his prophetic manner and his tendency to pull out from the society as indications of utter madness. But those who knew Blake well enough have stood as witnesses to the poet's great sense of reasoning. The last ten years of his life can be regarded as the happiest times of William Blake. It is during this time that he came in contact with John Linnel, the great landscape painter who helped Blake move

freely in London society, to a great extent. He got his illustrations of *The Book of Job* published in 1826. He bid farewell to this world on 12th of August, 1827 and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Dunhill Fields cemetery. Some of his most famous quotes include the followings:

A truth that's told with a bad intent beats all the lies you can invent.

No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings.

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.

A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.

Those who control their passions do so because their passions are weak enough to be controlled.

I was angry with my friend: I told my wrath, my wrath did end. I was angry with my foe: I told it not, my wrath did grow.

In the history of poetry William Blake is off late considered as much of an influential character and of the visual arts of the romantic age also.

Quite many works of Blake are acquired from the mystical way of thought process. In particular, the period of dualism, individual acknowledgement of darkness having its very own charms and the dissection of male and female could result in never ending consequences. The vocabulary of productions, the preparation of conceptual mysticism in twosomes, character development seems also quite mystical. The speculation of the Creation that the *Book of Urizen* puts forth, too gives off an outlandish mystical aroma. At the moment when Blake presents dualism by claiming as incarnate God who takes over the false god, Urizen it's here where he differs to quite an extent from the mystical sense of knowledge. Urizen which happens to be the false law is taken away from nature expanding dualism, by getting eradicated from nature as far as possible. Matter is transferred from evil the moment Christ is perceived as a total of all the Eternals, Himself, instead of Urizen.

As a matter of fact, the *The Book of Ahania* happens to be the second part and a continuation of the similar legend as of *Book*

of *Urizen*. This paper is just a tiny shot at the very essence that Blake's one of widely acclaimed *The Book of Ahania* holds within as well as the title-character, 'Ahania' herself, in Blake's many a prophetic books.

The book is all about the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, starting from the very point of man's arrival there. It also depicts the burden of the mosaic code, their establishment in Asia. Major characters of the poem include: Urizen, Fuzon (known as Luvah too) and Ahania. The mutiny of Fuzon (Passion) against Urizen (Reason) continues from the part 1 of this great work. Fuzon takes over Urizen in the haunch. Pressurises him to get rid of his production mainly Ahania (Pleasure). Blake indicates Fuzon to be the liberator of mankind. After the momentary victory Fuzon (Passion) is hit by the stone of Decalogue thrown by Urizen (Reason). Urizen later crucifies his body over the tree of religion. Urizen (Reason) later on casts out Ahania (Pleasure) who turns to Sin, being hidden. The concluding part of the book is all about the plight of Ahania in a state of banish.

Given an impressive and a complete shape in verses in the year 1795, the great work of Blake *the Book of Ahania*, is no less divine than any of the Prophetic Books. Indeed... it's a mythological epic. An illustration of pleasure and a yearning for great acumen, Ahania happens to be the fundamental element in Blake's method to reaching the heavenly insight even though she is seen to be discarded by Urizen for being the very disposition of Sin. Blake presents her as the stature of the 'Goddess of Wisdom'. She is also seen as representing pleasure. She becomes the reason of Urizen's son and daughter getting born. It is said that she gets separated from Urizen because of her son Fuzon's mutiny against Urizen his father. Later on Urizen parts with Ahania taking her to be sinful.

Ahania is seen being described in many of Blake's other works too. Apart from her presence in Blake's *The Book of Ahania* we get to find her in *Vala* or *The Four Zoas*. *Milton a Poem* also carries her touch within. *Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion* too emits a sign of her presence, where she is presented as a shade while Los sees the four emanations.

Being the sole embodiment of rational longing Ahania is seen in a descend condition after getting abandoned by Urizen that too as sinful. On the other hand this very title-character, Ahania is also seen as the main medium for taking place of a divine wisdom. The narrative depicts Ahania as a lonely being using her moments over grief. As per the narration her grief is the result of the terrible clash that takes place between Fuzon and Urizen. After paying thorough attention one can conclude that the mourning state of Ahania is somewhat quite familiar to the widowed character of Lorma to be found in the Ossian poems. And one can see that again the same thing is forwarded to another work namely *Europe a Prophecy*. Blake's 'Tree of Mystery' is first seen revealed only in his work *The Book of Ahania*. It is his first book where one gets to see the 'Tree of Mystery' being talked about. The tree acts as a symbol uniting the Christianity and Druidic belief and spats out that Christianity happens to be an extension of earlier traditions. It also represents the fact of Edmund Burke comparing the English nation with the English oak. People with a radical psyche like Blake were firmly considering the fact that instead of the oak, a tree of liberty should come out. One also gets to see the illustration of human sacrifice that is represented through the crucifixion of lifeless Fuzon, at the time when Urizen fixes the departed Fuzon into the Tree of Mystery. Taking this fact into consideration, one finds the tree to be very much familiar to the tree that grew throughout

the universe and was also holy to Odin. The Tree of Mystery thus is used by many a revolutionary minded characters like Blake, Thomas Paine etc. as an embodiment showing aggression towards both the customary rule as well as mainstream Christianity.

The Book of Ahania takes a special place being Blake's one of the most popular prophetic books. It got published in 1795. The illustration of the book is done by Blake's own plates. Depiction of women, emanations in quite a challenging way has always been a part of Blake's writing skills, especially when he associates himself to his prophetic way of writing. The relationship between the female sexuality and the personal outfit is likely to generate pessimistic outcomes. Determining the fact where womanhood is portrayed to be well built and vicious or pathetic and being in a denial mode. As Blake's psychic sphere expands, so does womanhood's constructive and pessimistic illustrations put on their importance through their upshot on their male counterparts. The neutral female companion of the tyrannical Urizen, who happens to be Ahania, indeed emerges to match this scheme. In a deceitful way Urizen marks her to be an epithet of evil sexual attraction allowing her to roam eternally, mourning for him. As of a self-determining character, Ahania shows no logic of herself at all. She gets inspired by desire. A feeling of getting reunited with Urizen at first but later on in grief that makes the final section of the poem, complete. This develops the longing for a vanished sexual union.

Though the book is named after the character of Ahania, the plot of *The Book of Ahania* is strongly male-oriented as of Ahania herself. The centre of attention becomes the acts of male characters. Ahania being of course, the title-character, in an unreceptive manner pays attention to and tolerates. Even the fall in the bond between Urizen and Ahania revolves around a masculine point. It happens to be the outcome of the extremely sexualized variance between a father and a son. Urizen and Fuzon. Fuzon makes his appearance as a pseudo-promethean stature as compared to Urizen's dictatorial type of a form towards the conclusion of *The Book of Urizen*. *The Book of Ahania* elevates this point and goes after Fuzon's futile moves to take down Urizen his father. Fuzon throws a globe of wrath at Urizen which in the middle of the way changes into a phallic spear. It passes through the great defence of Urizen and castrates him. Aggression of this attack is quite alarming in its implication of infiltration, rape. Hence Ahania's oust from Urizen and being born as a free being at the time of his castration turns out to be quite ill-fated. A certain amount of doubt keeps circling though, regarding Ahania's eviction. A result of Fuzon's destructive attack on Urizen or a chosen decision taken by Urizen, taking it's consequence into account. Of course one can get into a squabble and come to a point that Ahania's ejection was no doubt very much a personal decision, taken by Urizen.

Ahania, in the form of a woman is not just simply made of man rather banished from him. She is just a derivative of his coming out to his self-hood. At this very juncture, Blake in quite a sardonic manner points towards the splitting up of the sexes in Genesis. And also at the same time alters the importance from the creation of woman as a bodily vestige of man to something symbolic repercussion that femininity is somewhat less significant, eerie and basically imperfect. This can be accepted as a severe idiom of a proviso, which in one way or the other upsets quite a few things in Blake's collapsed world. Ahania, can very much be seen as an emblem of dearth in her male counterpart, at the time of her birth. One can find her to be an

imperceptible outer sketch of the desire of Urizen. The subdued yearning by which he has been badly affected due to the loss of his organs. Hence Ahania's characteristics, as a self-sufficient being has been rejected many a times.

The figure of Ahania, being the centre point in *The Book of Ahania*, induces quite awkward erotic qualities along with a lack of guile, fixing the paradoxical sequence of events of yearning and virtuousness. The quite an intense manifestation of Ahania, involves lushness and sexuality. On the other hand, the display of her open, comfortable show of gloom, advocates nothing but just naive perplexity. Of course she herself solely is not guilty for her sexualisation and she is not at all a demure seductress. Her personal misery and openly exhibited body strives for onlooker's notice. Her ordeal is drawn towards her centre. Here one, as an observer is attracted towards her charming delightful suffering and thus gets unknowingly involved in her miseries! Here Blake quite intelligently tries to analyse the urge of the mannish subject, on dictating, reprimanding the thing of his ruined longing, after taking into consideration the relationship of Urizen and Ahania. After the distance takes place between Urizen and Ahania, Urizen responds to the situation by taking a shot at managing and locking up Ahania. His mannerism of taking control over Ahania shows a certain kind of satirical patronize-concern. Urizen's behaviour towards her, displays a kind of tenderness, as well as brutalism. Giving an impression of guarding, he shows a kind of babyish care to her. Though, it's reflected from his reaction that, he seems to be somewhat profoundly pressurized by the fact of Ahania's appearance as a detached person. To a certain extent, the mannish characteristics of Urizen, display a lack of confidence. Still as an individual, he succeeds in making himself get somewhat near to his true self-consciousness. Since Ahania makes her appearance as a different, independent character, it brings forth certain facts that the manly anxiousness, masculine uniqueness of Urizen is established over a dormant womanliness which as a matter of fact, now seems to be alienated. Not within his reach anymore. When the narrative of *The Book of Ahania* gets going, we find Fuzon raising a mutiny against his father Urizen-

"Shall we worship this Demon of Smoke?"

Said Fuzon, "This abstract non-entity

This cloudy God seated on Waters

Now seen, now obscur'd: King of sorrow?" (10-13)

Assault in such a manner, when comes to an end; Fuzon with the help of fire hits Urizen and thereafter claims himself to be the Supreme God. This incident however becomes, as luck would happen, the sole reason of the appearance of the tree of mystery into which Fuzon's body gets nailed in the course of time-

Amaz'd started Urizen! When

He beheld himself compassed round

And high roofed over with trees

He arose but the stems stood so thick

He with difficulty and great pain

Brought his Books, all but the Book

Of iron, from the dismal shade (116-122)

And expressing her (Ahania's) grief after getting parted with Urizen, this great epic continues-

Cruel jealousy! Selfish fear!

Self-destroying: how can delight

Renew in these chains of darkness (233-235)

It can be said that keeping in view *The Book of Urizen*, the other two books namely *The Book of Ahania* and *The Book of Los* had been written in a refined form. In *The Book of Urizen* one gets to see the African civilization coming to an end which happens to be the third of the seven cycles, elaborating the narrative of the Garden of Eden. After reading the book one finds the narrative coming to an end getting Orc cursed as the serpent. From here on the story progresses further and it's in *The Book of Ahania* that one finds the next cycle taking place in Asia. Orc and Urizen's furious efforts in gaining control over the Israelites one gets to find in the book. It such happens that Urizen is associated with the pillar of cloud during the day, on the contrary Orc is related with the pillar of fire and is only visible during the night. It's only after the Israelites recognize the Ten Commandments that Urizen becomes successful in defeating Orc. Which, ultimately brings an end to the Israeli culture. The death of Orc can be visualized as the serpent on the mooses's pole both signifying the bereavement of the Israeli culture.

After going through the narrative between Orc and Urizen one can easily conclude that it certainly is a figurative saga. Urizen displays the aged barren figure, wiping out but not able to create. On the other hand, *The Book of Ahania* displays Urizen in the form of a father who has a son, in the name of Fuzon and who happens to be an Orc embodying fire. Orc and the Urizen forms are thus united. It can be summed up that the subject matter that *The Book of Ahania* deals with is again forwarded to the book of *The Four Zoas*.

Blake's mythology that appears in many of his prophetic books is to a great extent created by himself! "Urizen", "Enitharmon", "Bromion", "Luvah" are certain characters from his prophetic books that he vividly narrates to us. Based upon the Bible and the Greek and Norse mythology Blake's mythology carries within itself many a Blake's design regarding the eternal Gospel! "I must create a system, or be enslav'd by another Man's. I will not Reason & Compare; my business is to create." – Los in Blake's *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion* Blake at times was against the traditional Christianity. He was in firm belief that it greatly promoted restraining of all the innate aspirations.

"Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed and governed their Passions or have no Passions but because they have Cultivated their Understandings. The Treasures of Heaven are not Negations of Passion but Realities of Intellect from which All the Passions Emanate uncurbed in their Eternal Glory." (E564)- William Blake in *a Vision of the Last Judgment*. William Blake speaks on religion in his work titled *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors.

1. That man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That energy, called Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, called Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

The following divergent however are true to these

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a Portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.

2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

3. Energy is Eternal Delight. (Plate4, E34)

William Blake was never in for the opinion that the body is different from the soul. And that it must give in to the rule of the soul. However contrary to this he accepted the body as the very expansion to the soul, obtained from the acumen of the senses. Blake always went against the literalism of mystical thoughts that justifies pain as well as acknowledges evil and confesses to injustice. He was greatly been repulsed-by self-denial and linked it with the devout domination, mainly sexual domination: "Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity. XXX He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence." (7.4-5, E35) He visualised the very perception of 'sin' as a catch to tie men's crave (the briars of *Garden of Love*) and considered the fact that self-control in submission to a moral code forced upon from the outside was not supposed to be in favour of existence. Blake goes on to say:

*Abstinence sows sand all over
The ruddy limbs and flaming hair
But Desire Gratified
Plants fruits & beauty there. (E474)*

He never carried the principle of God as Lord. Something that is divided from and greater than humankind. This is clearly reflected in the words when he goes on to say regarding Jesus Christ, "He is the only God... and so am I, and so are you."

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* his lines go by this, "men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast". This is certainly in regard to his faith in autonomy and communal parity in the society and amid the sexes.

Blake had quite a multifaceted association with the enlightenment way of life. He was always against the 'Newtonian' vision of the universe because of his prophetic spiritual faith. One finds this outlook very much revealed in a passage from his work *Jerusalem* which goes something like this:

I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe and there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton. Black the cloth in heavy wreathes folds over every Nation; cruel Works Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace. (15. 14-20, E159)

Blake detested the slavery and always was in favour of ethnic and sexual equality. Many a poems as well as paintings of Blake reveal a kind of universal kindness: "As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various)". As narrated by a black child in one of his poems, white and black bodies alike are described as shaded groves or clouds, which exist only until one learns "to bear the beams of love"-

When I from black and he from white cloud free, And round the tent of God like lambs we joy: Ill shade him from the heat till he can bear, to lean in joy upon our father's knee. And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair, and be like him and he will then love me. (23-8, E9)

Blake to a certain extent has always associated himself with the social and political affairs throughout his life. Quite a many, social and political speech done through his spiritual symbolisms justify it. He does the differentiation between the Old Testament God and the New Testament God while discarding the restraints of the former and viewing the later as a positive influence. This is reflected in his *Songs of Experience* quiet well which also happens to be a carrier of his religious faith.

Blake has stated that from a very early age he was introduced to seeing visions. One story related to his childhood goes by something like this: when he was just four years old he "saw God" when God "put his head to the window" making young Blake go screaming. Blake when was eight or ten years of age, in Peckham Rye, London, says to have seen "a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." Blake's Victorian biographer Gilchrist goes on to say that when young Blake came home to report this matter, he got a good amount of thrashing from his father for having told a lie with the involvement of his mother. To a great extent all the facts prove that Blake's parents were quite supportive towards him. In-fact Blake's mother seems to have been a lot more, in this case. The walls of her mother's chamber can be found filled with the early drawings and paintings of Blake. In another situation Blake claims when he was gazing at some haymakers working he thought of seeing some angelic figures move within them.

All throughout his life Blake argues to have been familiar with all these vision kind of things. This seemed to have been related with many good looking spiritual subject matter and similes. And these might have motivated him to move further in the direction of his mystical journey. No doubt throughout, Blake's work, display a series of divine notions, metaphors to a great extent. God and Christianity created the spiritual centre of his works. Blake even goes on to say that the Archangels in person used to inspire him to progress further in his creative works and also states that those very same Archangels used to also read all his mystical works and used to derive great pleasure!

William Blake writes in *A Vision of The Last Judgement*:

Error is Created Truth is Eternal Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to Behold it I assert for Myself that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & Action it as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me. What it will be Questioned When the Sun rises do you not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea O no no I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look through it & not with it. (E565-6)

William Wordsworth's words regarding Blake, "There was no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott."

John William Cousins in the "A Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature" wrote about Blake in quite a different form, that Blake was "a truly pious and loving soul, neglected and misunderstood by the world, but appreciated by an elect few", who "led a cheerful and contented life of poverty illumined by visions and celestial inspirations."

The recently published 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* questions Blake's sanity and goes on to comment, "*The question whether Blake was or was not mad seems likely to remain in dispute, but there can be no doubt whatever that he was at different periods of his life under the influence of illusions for which there are no outward facts to account, and that much of what he wrote is so far wanting in the quality of sanity as to be without a logical coherence.*"

William Blake spent the final years of his life at Fountain Court, in Strand, London. Though at a later stage, the Savoy Hotel replaced the property during the 1880's. At the time of his death i.e. 12th of August 1827, Blake was lost in writing his work on the *Dante* series. It is said that he stopped his writing and moved towards his wife who by that time was in tears by the bed side. Holding her, by his side, it is considered that he cried out these lines, "Stay Kate! Keep just as you are – I will draw your portrait – for you have ever been an angel to me." After the completion of the portrait he kept down all his equipments and started singing hymns and verses. He promised his wife to be with her forever and after promising her, that evening at six O' clock in the evening, he breathed his last. According to Blake's Victorian biographer Gilchrist's word, during the time of Blake's death a female dweller was very much present at the house and she says: "I have been at the death, not of a man, but of a blessed angel." Pointing towards Blake's death, in a letter to Samuel Palmer, George Richmond writes:

He died... in a most glorious manner. He said He was going to that Country he had all His life wished to see & expressed Himself Happy, hoping for Salvation through Jesus Christ – Just before he died His Countenance became fair. His eyes Brighten'd and he burst out Singing of the things he saw in Heaven.

Linnell had paid some amount of money to Catherine and that money was used for Blake's funeral. William Blake finally got buried after five days of his death on the eve of his 45th wedding anniversary, at the Dissenter's burial ground in Bunhill Fields. No doubt questions have been raised against his Sanity, but that's what life is all about. Here everything one does, creative/imaginative/destructive never goes unquestioned by the world. Nonetheless whatever the case may be, William Blake forever remains as a poet of great intellect, vision, symbolism, mysticism, enlightened values and creativity.

Blessed be his Soul!

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