SPIRITUAL REVIVAL AND SOCIAL REBELLION IN WILLIAM BLAKE AND KAHLLIL GIBRAN: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

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BY

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Under the Supervision of

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The thesis is divided into five chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. Blake and Gibran are not compared in all the chapters but the main chapters thoroughly compare the works of the two writers. Their social, political, and economic context, their vision and worldview are also evaluated in comparison with each other.

In Chapter I of the thesis Blake and the context against which he wrote are discussed at length. The chapter discusses the inception of romanticism in England whose chief originator was Blake himself. This chapter deals with Blake, Blake’s writings and his other preoccupations. However its focus is on Blake as the originator of English Romanticism. It talks at length about how the Romantic Movement started and tries to define romanticism. This chapter tries to differentiate Romanticism from its preceding Enlightenment ideology and general eighteenth century literary culture. It traces the changes in the intellectual history from Enlightenment thought of 18th century to the Romantic thought at the close of 18th century and during the first half of 19th century. It is seen that the Romantic Movement was influenced by foreign philosophers and poets like Rousseau and Goethe. The chapter also introduces those writers who came before the Romantic Movement proper but contributed to its growth and can be called pre-romantics like James Thomson, William Collins, Thomas Gray, Robert Burns, William Cowper, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, James Macpherson and Thomas Percy and tries to establish Blake as the originator and pioneer of Romantic Movement in England. Then some poems from *Poetical sketches* and *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are discussed in detail in order to see the
romantic themes employed by Blake. Examples from some of his other later works are also given.

Chapter II deals with Gibran, his life, his writings and his chief preoccupations as a writer. It traces Gibran’s evolution as a writer and the foreign influences he absorbed after migrating to US. This chapter focuses on Gibran’s contribution to Arabic romanticism and chief romantic qualities of his writings. It also talks about how Gibran was influenced by English romantics especially Blake whose influence on him was the greatest. It discusses Gibran’s childhood, his love of nature and his sensitiveness and the influence of his homeland Besharri on him as a man and a poet. It talks about his emigration to America in 1895 and how he interacted with Boston’s social and intellectual life and discovered its flourishing world of art and literature; how he met Fred Holland Day, who supported him greatly in his artistic endeavors, and Mary Haskell whose support and guidance and help with his English was very important for Gibran’s growth as a writer. The chapter also mentions how Gibran with the help of Day and Mary came under the influence of English language poets especially English romantics. Next, this chapter relates in detail the publication of his books from time to time and discusses the themes of his works, focusing on the romantic sensibility and elements and compares some of his prose poems with Keats and Shelley’s’ poems for his love of beauty, nature and innocence etc. This chapter tries to establish him as the pioneer of Arabic romanticism. It talks about how he introduced western romanticism into Arabic. He developed a new form called prose poem. He was interested in imagination, nature, childhood, love, beauty, liberty etc. like English Romantics. The chapter also discusses his social rebellion, mysticism, social reform, isolation, love of instinct and intuition and his immense contribution to Arabic literature and his innovations in Arabic literature.
Chapter III compares mystical thoughts which run through the works of Blake and Gibran. It talks about their difference as well as similarities as mystics living in different traditions. This chapter traces their development and evolution as mystics and the influences which helped them to evolve. The chapter establishes that the essence of their mystical thought was same though there were some minute differences. It starts with the definition of mysticism and talks about it in detail and how a mystic perceives himself or herself in relation to reality. Different mystics choose different paths to reach the same reality i.e., to experience divine consciousness, enlightenment and oneness with the one who contains all. Then the chapter discusses in detail about different schools of mysticism like Christian mysticism, Islamic mysticism, Sufism, Kabala, Gnosticism etc. It talks about how mystics have chosen poetry as a vehicle to convey their message because it is not easy to pass gnosis in any other medium. Then it tries to relate romanticism and mysticism and tries to establish Blake as the mystic proper and a supreme creator. It talks in detail about Blake’s mystic status and how Blake used himself as the instrument of the divine. How Blake spend his life for the purpose of revealing higher truths. His spiritual life was more important to him than his creative life. He was a visionary mystic. He was a poet mystic. It talks about how Blake influenced poets who came after him like Yeats but he greatly influenced Gibran. Gibran like Blake was a poet mystic. Then the similarities in Blake’s and Gibran’s thoughts are seen. Though Gibran was not a mystic proper but at moments he seems to be a mystic of higher order. How both used the gift of poetry to put through their gnosis. Blake’s search for spiritual truth is related by analyzing his poems and mystical thoughts focusing on the poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Lines from ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’ are also quoted. In the same way Gibran’s prose poems are
analyzed for their mystical content. *The Prophet* is analyzed in detail. Each of Gibran’s work can be read and interpreted in the light of Blake’s mystic thought.

Chapter IV is a comparative study of Blake’s and Gibran’s social rebellion, social protest and social reform. It deals at length with Blake’s and Gibran’s development as social critics. They both abhorred injustice of all kinds. They stood for the poor and the week. They were severe critics of Orthodox Church and tyrant state. Blake and Gibran, though born in different countries and contexts, had strong affinities with each other. This chapter discusses in detail how Gibran came under the influence of Blake’s revolutionary vision, and how he like Blake abhorred stale social customs and stood in rebellion against the institutions of state and church. Both stood for woman’s emancipation and liberation. The religious beliefs of both Blake and Gibran were at odds with the common people as well as with religious authorities. It analyses in detail some important passages from the works of both writers for their revolutionary and rebellious content and compares them with each other in order to see the similarities as well as the impact of Blake on Gibran. It shows that Blake and Gibran were actively involved in the political development of their times. The chapter gives a detailed analysis and comparison of Blake’s *Vision of Daughters of Albion* and Gibran’s *Broken Wings* and how both stood for the rights of woman and criticized false morals of the society. A detailed study of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Gibran’s “John the Mad Man” and “Cry of the Graves” is made. Blake’s *America, a Prophecy* and Gibran’s “My Countrymen”; Blake’s *Tiriel* and Gibrans “Kahlil, the Heretic” are also compared and analyzed. Some poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are compared to Gibran’s “Decayed Teeth”, “Slavery” and “Narcotics and Dissecting Knives”.
Chapter V of this thesis discusses the style, use of prosody, symbols and myths employed by these two writers. It talks at length about Blake’s use of myths and symbols. This chapter talks about Gibran’s use of symbols and his deft use of language. However it is found that there are not many similarities in their style or use of myths and symbols. Gibran’s works can be compared to Blake’s songs in their style but there is no comparison when it comes to the Blake’s prophetic works. It talks in detail about the relation of myths and symbols with poetry in general and romantic poetry in particular. Blake invented his own mythology and used fresh symbols. The chapter talks in detail about the mythic world and symbolic characters created by Blake and it nuances and subtleties. Blake had to take recourse to these myths and symbols because it was not possible otherwise to present his gnosis. Then some poems from *Songs of Experience* are analyzed stylistically for their grammar, prosody, metaphors, structure etc. Gibran style and use of symbols is also discussed in detail. It is said that though Blake and Gibran had many similarities in terms of subject matter and themes of their works but their styles didn’t match except for Blake’s earlier works especially *Songs of Innocence and Experience* have the simplicity of diction and melody which we find throughout in Gibran’s writing. The influence of Blake, Bible and Nietzsche on Gibran’s style is discussed in detail. Gibran contribution to Arabic literature in terms of style is highlighted. Then some passages from *The Prophet* are analyzed stylistically.

The thesis is concluded on the note that Blake and Gibran can be compared to many other romantic and mystics. The result of this thesis indicates that a certain amount of time and academic consideration might be given for the development of research into the relationship between the literatures of the west and the east in order to promote mutual understanding, peace and harmony because literature, to a great
extent, encompasses all the facets of social, political, economic, cultural, ethical and spiritual fabric of the society. That will also help in appreciating and understanding literatures across cultures without any prior consideration for language and nationality.
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2012
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Certificate

This is to certify that Mr. Shabir Hussain Ganaie has completed his Ph.D thesis entitled "Spiritual Revival and Social Rebellion in William Blake and Kahlil Gibran: A Comparative Perspective" for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English under my supervision.

This is an original work and a meaningful contribution to the field of Comparative Studies in English.

I find it suitable for submission for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

(Dr. Sami Rafiq)
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(SHABIR HUSSAIN GANAIE)
Introduction
INTRODUCTION

In the words of Henry H H Remak:

Comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g., painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences (e.g., politics, economics, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.¹

The subject of Comparative Studies generally explores various literatures of the world or the literatures within one particular nation. It stresses the influence of literatures of different historical periods and countries upon one another. It studies their use of similar forms and their treatment of similar themes, etc. Comparative study, whatever the subject it explores and analyses, brings enlightenment and gives birth to new thoughts and concepts. It examines and tries to find new modes of analyzing literatures written in the world. Its exploration of varied approaches to analogous problems or common subjects and practices in the literatures written in different cultural environments, gives birth to a feeling of professional relationship between these literatures. It helps to find out relationship, at both surface and deeper level, between apparently distant cultures, traditions and historical milieus. Comparative study generally deals with the literatures from different countries or communities with different languages, cultures and traditions. In this way it motivates us to pay attention to the contribution and the socio-cultural functions of literatures and how these

literatures offer a comprehensive understanding of life and its various aspects. It helps literatures as well as readers to go beyond the limits of their national language. It has been seen that the literature of one nation absorbs influences of literatures from other nations and cultures and even the writers who know nothing of each other, show fascinating resemblances apart from differences. The basic plan of Comparative Literature is to encourage reading across linguistic borders. By doing so it makes readers aware about the issues and themes that are generally circumvented and ignored by the exclusive focus on a national literature and national language. Comparative study helps us to study creative writing and literary movements rising above the national and cultural limitations. It teaches us to observe life from multiple points of view. According to Henry H H Remak, “Comparative literature requires that a work, author, trend or theme be actually compared with a work, author, trend or theme of another country or sphere...” Comparative studies is in many ways a new approach to deal with literatures. The studies which have been carried out using this approach demonstrate that when well executed, it adds significantly to our comprehension and appreciation of literature and authors. Comparative study of writers from different cultures is in a way a comparison between diverse literary traditions. This approach encourages assessment of a silent affiliation between the workings of the minds of writers who are on the whole universally similar. It is very rewarding to study the relationship between the literatures of different periods and different countries. The interdisciplinary nature of Comparative studies’ means that the scholars working in this area, in general, have some knowledge about translation studies, sociology, critical theory, cultural studies, religious studies, history, etc.

²Ibid., p. 107.
This thesis will embark on a study in comparative literature comparing two great romantic poets, William Blake and Kahlil Gibran. It is an examination of the impact and influence of Blake on Gibran. It is a study of influences and literary indebtedness. According to J. T. Shaw, “The study of literary indebtedness has never given up its place as an important branch of literary research within particular literatures, and especially in comparative literature.”\(^3\) Though the genesis of works of Blake and Gibran are from different literary environments, the two poets, to a large extent, share spiritual and social insights of a same kind. According to George Nicolas EL-Hage, “I assert that Gibran owed more to Blake than any other poet or philosopher and that Blake’s influence on him was the most enduring.”\(^4\) I have tried to bring together the points of association shared by these two writes. We know that there are times when two writers emerge from different periods and literary backgrounds and have in common with each other more than they do with other writers of their own time and national literature. Similarities between Blake and Gibran, more at a spiritual level, transcend dissimilar literary backgrounds. They share a common way of contemplation and communication that binds them in an exceptional relationship. Gibran read Blake and was greatly influenced by his thought and style. He was overwhelmed by his poetic philosophy, his visions and the prophetic charge of both his poetry and paintings. “Blake is the God-man. His drawings are so far the profoundest things done in English – and his vision, putting aside his drawings and his poems, is the most godly.”\(^5\) However he did not imitate him blindly. His found that his own ideas were similar to those of Blake. Whatever he learnt from Blake he made that his own in an original and innovative way. We can trace this influence by

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 58.


\(^5\) Quoted in EL-Hage, p. 141.
focusing on the intrinsic themes and the form employed by these two writers. J.T.

Shaw aptly writes,

Influence, to be meaningful, must be manifested in an intrinsic form, upon or
within the literary works themselves. It may be shown in style, images,
characters, themes, mannerisms, and it may also be shown in content, thought,
ideas, the general Weltanschauung presented by particular works.\(^6\)

He further writes,

The center of interest should be what the borrowing or influenced author does
with what he takes and what effect it has upon the finished literary work. The
study of direct literary relationships and literary indebtedness can be
indispensable to understanding and evaluating the individual work of art, not
only for placing it in the literary tradition, but also for defining what it is and
what it essentially attempts and for determining wherein it succeeds.\(^7\)

This thesis argues that Blake and Gibran have enough in common to justify the
creation of a new, better defined area of research between the fields of English and
Lebanese-American-Arabic literature. Blake and Gibran lived in different political
and even religious environments and yet both were rebels and mystics at odds with
the affairs of state and religion. As poets they wrote in different countries and their
literary traditions vary greatly, yet both made prolific use of symbols. Through five
chapters of this thesis Blake and Gibran are compared and their essential common
characteristics are explored. It is argued that these poets display a very radical stance
against orthodoxy of all kinds and an intense focus on inner spiritual life and these

\(^6\) Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective, p. 66.
\(^7\) Ibid., p. 71.
subjects were of higher priority to them than creativity. This thesis is a journey from the poetry into the poetics of two writers. The interminable drama of existence is played out on the pages of both men. Gibran was not a mere replica of Blake. He found the support and affirmation for his early principles and beliefs in Blake’s works and developed them in his own distinctive way.

My method of approach will be fundamentally individual one. I shall first read separately Gibran’s and Blake’s writings in their own contexts and then compare them with each other. This research employs a biographical approach and also focuses on the close readings of the writings of original texts of the two writers. As such, the research presented here could be called conventional. It does not make use of any special theory whether classical or modern. Focusing on the texts of two writers and discovering the similarities between the two poets’s from two different traditions is in itself a useful method and criteria for examining these poets. This set of criteria will enable examination of not only literary methods in the works of such poets, but also establish a relationship between their imaginative faculties. Blake and Gibran are poets whose reputation as poetic masters extends beyond the boundaries of their countries and beyond the centuries in which they lived. Within the current field of literary studies, it is difficult to establish a comparative approach when dealing with poets who do not fit in the same literary tradition or period. Such an approach requires in the first instance a great breadth of knowledge concerning diverse literary traditions. For example in order to compare Blake and Gibran one would first have to begin with the separate traditions of English romanticism, and Arabic romanticism as well as pay attention to the social and political backgrounds of the poets.
While some remarks about Blake’s influence on Gibran can be found scattered in books on the Lebanese American poet, no attempt except by George El-Hage has been made to bring the two writers together in a thorough comparison with a detailed analysis of their works. The title of his PhD thesis which is now in a book form is *William Blake and Kahlil Gibran: Poets of Prophetic Vision*. But throughout this book his focus is on imagination, nature and prophecy only. The majority of comparative literature studies taking Blake as the predominant figure compare him with some other western poet. Numerous scholars have compared Blake with poets such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Yeats and other European poets. Only a small number have set Blake beside eastern poets. Rosy Sing attempts a comparison between the east and the west in her work *Tagore, Rilke, and Gibran: A comparative Study*. These comparative studies are infrequent, however, and do not seem to be consolidated into a particular field.

The worlds Blake and Gibran inherited have similarities outnumbering their differences, one may assume because of their living in different countries, culture and times. Both were poets, painters, mystics and visionaries. Both were romantics and like all romantics valued nature, children, emotions, intuition and discarded reason giving foremost importance to imagination. Both poets considered themselves as one with the bard and the prophet. More so, they viewed themselves as the witness of the absolute truth, the spectators of all time and existence. Blake and Gibran through their writings fought for the rights of women and criticized the patriarchy and religious institutions for suppressing the weak. Both the writers vehemently criticized orthodox religions taking an example of Christianity for it committed wrong against humanity by propagating false morality.
The thesis is divided into five chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. Blake and Gibran are not compared in all the chapters but the main chapters thoroughly compare the works of the two writers. Their social, political, and economic context, their vision and worldview are also evaluated in comparison with each other. As Henry H H Remak says, "A comparative literature study does not have to be comparative on every page nor even in every chapter, but the overall intent, emphasis and execution must be comparative."8

In Chapter I of the thesis Blake and the context against which he wrote are discussed at length. The chapter discusses the inception of romanticism in England whose chief originator was Blake himself. This chapter deals with Blake, his writings and his other preoccupations. However its focus is on Blake as the originator of English Romanticism. It talks at length about how the Romantic Movement started and tries to define romanticism. This chapter tries to differentiate Romanticism from its preceding Enlightenment ideology and general eighteenth century literary culture. It traces the changes in the intellectual history from Enlightenment thought of the 18th century to the Romantic thought at the close of the 18th century and during the first half of the 19th century. It is seen that the Romantic Movement was influenced by foreign philosophers and poets like Rousseau and Goethe. The chapter also introduces those writers who came before the Romantic Movement but contributed to its growth and can be called pre-romantics like James Thomson, William Collins, Thomas Gray, Robert Burns, William Cowper, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, James Macpherson and Thomas Percy and tries to establish Blake as the originator and pioneer of Romantic Movement in England. Then some poems from Poetical sketches

8 Ibid., p. 15.
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and his immense contribution to Arabic literature and his innovations in Arabic literature.

Chapter III compares mystical thoughts which run through the works of Blake and Gibran. It expresses their differences as well as similarities as mystics living in different traditions. This chapter traces their development and evolution as mystics and the influences which helped them to evolve. The chapter establishes that the essence of their mystical thought was same though apparently different. It starts with the definition of mysticism and talks in detail about mystic perception in relation to reality i.e., how different mystics choose different paths to reach the same reality and to experience divine consciousness, enlightenment and oneness with the one who contains all. The chapter discusses in detail about different schools of mysticism like Christian mysticism, Islamic mysticism, Kabala, Gnosticism etc. It talks about how mystics have chosen poetry as a vehicle to convey their message because it is not easy to pass gnosis in any other medium. It tries to relate romanticism and mysticism and tries to establish Blake as the mystic proper and a supreme creator. It talks in detail about Blake’s mystic status and how Blake saw himself as the instrument of the divine and how he spent his life for the purpose of revealing higher truths. His spiritual life was more important to him than his creative life. He was a visionary mystic and a poet mystic. Blake’s search for spiritual truth has been studied by analyzing his poems and mystical thoughts focusing on the poems from Songs of Innocence and Experience. Lines from ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’ are also quoted. In the same way Gibran’s prose poems have been analyzed for their mystical content. The Prophet is analyzed in detail.
Chapter IV is a comparative study of Blake’s and Gibran’s social rebellion, social protest and social reform. It deals at length with Blake’s and Gibran’s development as social critics. They both abhorred injustice of all kinds. They stood for the poor and the weak. They were severe critics of Orthodox Church and tyrant state. Blake and Gibran, though born in different countries and contexts, had strong affinities with each other. This chapter discusses in detail how Gibran came under the influence of Blake’s revolutionary vision, and how he like Blake abhorred outdated social customs and stood in rebellion against the institutions of state and church. Both stood for woman’s emancipation and liberation. The religious beliefs of both Blake and Gibran were at odds with the common people as well as with religious authorities. It analyses in detail some important passages from the works of both writers for their revolutionary and rebellious content and compares them with each other in order to see the similarities as well as the impact of Blake on Gibran. It shows that Blake and Gibran were actively involved in the political development of their times. The chapter gives a detailed analysis and comparison of Blake’s *Vision of Daughters of Albion* and Gibran’s *Broken Wings* and how both championed the rights of woman and criticized false morals of the society. A detailed study of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Gibran’s “John the Mad Man” and “Cry of the Graves” has been made. Blake’s *America, a Prophecy* and Gibran’s “My Countrymen”; Blake’s *Tiriel* and Gibran’s “Kahlil, the Heretic” have been also compared and analyzed. Some poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* have been compared to Gibran’s “Decayed Teeth”, “Slavery” and “Narcotics and Dissecting Knives”.

Chapter V of this thesis discusses the style, use of prosody, symbols and myths employed by these two writers. It talks at length about Blake’s use of myths and symbols. This chapter talks about Gibran’s use of symbols and his deft use of
language. However it is found that there are not many similarities in their style and the use of myths and symbols. Gibran’s works can be compared to Blake’s songs in their style but there is no comparison when it comes to the Blake’s prophetic works. It talks in detail about the relation of myths and symbols with poetry in general and romantic poetry in particular. Blake invented his own mythology and used fresh symbols. The chapter talks in detail about the mythic world and symbolic characters created by Blake and it nuances and subtleties. Blake had to take recourse to these myths and symbols because it was not possible to present his gnosis otherwise. Some poems from *Songs of Experience* are analyzed stylistically for their grammar, prosody, metaphors, structure etc. Gibran style and use of symbols is also discussed in detail. It is said that though Blake and Gibran had many similarities in terms of subject matter and themes of their works but their styles didn’t match with the exception to Blake’s earlier works such as *Songs of Innocence and Experience* have the simplicity of diction and melody which we find throughout Gibran’s writing. The influence of Blake, Bible and Nietzsche on Gibran’s style is discussed in detail. Gibran’s contribution to Arabic literature in terms of style is highlighted. Some passages from *The Prophet* are also analyzed stylistically.
Chapter-1

William Blake: A Forerunner of English Romanticism
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Romanticism was born in England towards the end of the eighteenth century and it was immediately recognized as a new consciousness and a new school of thought. It had not much to do with things widely considered as "romantic," (the word as it is used in a literal sense) even though love has been quite frequently the theme of Romantic art and literature. Rather, it was a worldwide artistic and philosophical movement that redefined the basic traditions in the light of which people in Western cultures thought about themselves and observed their world. While romantic poetry can, for sure, be about ‘romance’ and about everything that this term means and suggests, in its most general sense, romantic poetry can be about practically anything and the expression ‘romantic’ is related more to the style, attitude and world view of the poet than to any definite subject matter. The movement did not come from nowhere. It was an upshot of a long historical progression. It was a reaction to its own past but at the same time this movement embraced with open arms all that it found glorious and majestic in both the ancient as well as the recent history. Romanticism had its background in the political and social mayhem of varied shades. This time of history was witness to the Seven Years of War (a global military conflict between 1756 and 1763, involving most of the great powers of the time and affecting Europe, North America, Central America, the West African coast, India, and the Philippines), The French and Indian War (1775-1763), The American Revolution (1775-1783), and the great event called The French Revolution (1775-1783).It saw the burgeoning of the Industrial Revolution and experienced so many other private and public upheavals. This period of history which is generally known as Romantic era produced a literature which reflected its milieu in the fullest measure possible and
the label 'romantic' came to be associated with all most all the writers writing at that point of time in history. The writers of this era were true representatives of their age as they balanced their finely tuned historical awareness with the present and now. Romanticism as a term has proved to be mystifying, as it is difficult to define it precisely and to locate the exact period to which it can be applied. There are as many definitions of the term as the number of critics. There have been thousands of excellent definitions or characterizations of what “Romantic” means in literature, etc., but none of them truly explains it comprehensively or convincingly. There are always works or authors who are in general considered “Romantic” but they don't fit a particular pattern. Sometimes it seems that we can only speak about Romanticisms. However, the fact of evading any explicit definition does not divest it of its richness and depth. This only shows the magnificence, glory and the vigor of the romantic mode of thinking and writing. Maurice Bowra tries to clear the mist by saying:

The word “Romantic” has been used so often and for so many purposes that it is impossible to confine it to any single meaning, still less to attempt a new definition of it. Let it suffice that it is applied to a phase of English poetry which began in 1789 with Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and ended with the death of Keats and Shelley. This at least fixes a historical period, and there is no great quarrel about calling it the “Romantic age.” In its five major poets, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats, despite many differences, agreed on the vital point: that the creative imagination is closely connected with a peculiar insight into an unseen order behind visible things.¹

Romanticism was a rejection of the grounds of reason, calm, restraint, decorum, mechanism, moderation, balance, stability, uniformity, universality, order, rationality and abstract thought which were characteristic features of neoclassicism or the age of reason of eighteenth century. It stood for liberty from all kinds of subjugation to rules and regulations, and the poets were left to delight freely in their romantic fancy. It paved the way for wonder and enchantment and heralded the dawn of a new way of observing life not by the modes of regulation, lucidity and tranquility, but by the means of enthusiasm and emotional gusto. It was a shift from theoretical interpretation to psychological investigation, from strict obedience of rules to individual freedom of expression and in other words from imitation to innovation. Enlightenment ideology thought of the world as a mechanical apparatus ruled by logical law. Romantic ideology envisioned the world on the model of a living organism which can be felt and intuited. Eighteenth century literary culture gave preference to the satirical mode, poetic diction, and rhymed couplet. It distrusted originality and imitated established models. It disapproved and held in disdain primitive and exotic societies and preferred present civilization in contrast to the past. The Augustan conception of the poet was that a poet is not more than a producer of objects. They could not think of a poet as a prophet, visionary, or seer. Poets used their wit to enliven their art and they paid minute attention to the world around them and created emblematic images easily understood by a collective, common perception. These images, drawn from the life, provided examples for teaching and improving the world in which they lived.

Changes in the social order, inaugurated in the 18th century and enduring into nineteenth century, brought about the Romantic Movement. It started as a reaction against the intellectualism of the Enlightenment and against the stiffness of social
structures which were built to defend the privilege enjoyed by a particular class of people. It registered a strong protest against the avarice of an age which, in the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution, already demonstrated signs of making labourers the servants of technology and of creating filthy urban environments. Romantic writers strongly resisted the onslaught of eighteenth century philosophy and literature on the minds and imagination of people. Whatever they saw as drab and arid in the thought process of past ages, they rejected and replaced with new thinking. The Romantics opposed Enlightenment because it hindered free play of emotions and creativity. Like Jean Jacques Rousseau, who was a major Genevan philosopher, writer, and composer of 18th-century Romanticism, the Romantics craved for human freedom. In turning inwards and relying on the voice of inner conscience, Romanticism followed Rousseau and also incorporated his identification of the natural as the locus of truth and authenticity. Rousseau had started the “back to nature” movement some years before the blossoming of Romantic Movement in England, arguing that civilization was accountable for mankind’s wretchedness, an argument that seems more relevant in our day. Under his impact Romanticism evolved as a strong resistance to the pressures of metropolitan modernization. Rousseau who was a high priest of romanticism constantly contrasted nature with civilization, exalting the former and denouncing the latter. He provided a philosophical background to Romanticism as it evolved as a principal force in nineteenth century. An early German influence came from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose 1774 novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* had such a strong influence on the young men across the Europe that they started comparing themselves with its protagonist, a young artist with a very sensitive and passionate disposition. Owing to the romantic philosophy reason was discarded in favor of imagination as it was
thought that reason reduces man to a mere machine. Literature of imitation which characterized the past ages gave way to the literature of expression. There was a drastic change in the lexis and diction found in the writings of old writers as the new writers were in search of fresh possibilities which language was capable of. Language of intellect gave way to the language of spirit. In fact a new literary terminology was born in the hands of the writers who saw themselves at loggerheads with their preceding age. In tracing the changes in metaphors related to the artistic creation from Neoclassicism to Romanticism M.H. Abrams aptly writes:

The change from imitation to expression, and from the mirror to the fountain, the lamp, and related analogues, was not an isolated phenomenon. It was an integral part of a corresponding change in popular epistemology--- that is, in the concept of the role played by the mind in the perception which was current among romantic poets and critics. And the movement from eighteenth - to early nineteenth - century schemes of the mind and its place in nature is indicated by a mutation of metaphors almost exactly parallel to that in contemporary discussions of the nature of art.²

The new movement valued subjectivity, individuality, the emotions, the visions, spontaneity and the transcendental. It laid a greater emphasis on the concept of imagination accompanied with intuition, instincts and feelings. The romantic disposition responded to emotions rather than reason. It was excited by unknown rather than persuaded by lucid and logical worldly matters. It catered more zealously to the individual conscience than to the demands of society, and favored revolution to approval. The belief in man’s creative potential grew stronger. Man came to be seen

as a demigod who with the power of his imagination can transform inanimate entities into animate entities. The mind no longer was thought as a passive receptor but an active creator. The ability of a poet to work wonders with the simple tools of language was attributed to a special faculty called imagination. In fact, all the writers of Romantic era held the faculty of imagination in high esteem. The poet critics such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley elaborated in detail on the minutest nuances of imagination as a creative faculty and before them Blake had written in detail about the power of imagination in both his poetry and letters. In the words of Maurice Bowra: “If we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance which they attached to the imagination and in the special view which they held of it.”

Romanticism strongly pleaded for return to nature. The movement believed in goodness of human race, and rediscovered the artist as a supremely individual creator. The poet came to be seen as a solitary being with a keen and intense perception believing in the workings of his own mind. His confidence in his own self grew to immense heights. The romantic poet had such a great assurance about the potency of his creative powers that he thought he is the only one who can endow a common man with a vision to see what lies beyond mundane, this worldly affairs. The romantic poet saw himself essentially as a creator helping his audience to get an insight into the depths of reality:

The Romantics knew that their business was to create, and through creation to enlighten the whole sentient and conscious self of man, to wake his imagination to the reality which lies behind or in familiar things, to rouse him from the deadening routine of custom and unfathomable depths, to make him

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\textsuperscript{3} The Romantic Imagination, p. 1.
see that mere reason is not enough and that what he needs is inspired intuition.

Some of the other main characteristics of this movement were interest in the common man, childhood, rural life, gothic, folk tales, old legends, pristine nature, rustics etc. Patriotism was an important factor in the Romantic Movement, and many authors turned to folk tales and indigenous mythologies as source material and exulted in the cultural richness of their respective countries. They rejoiced in their own past when their nations were an epitome of glory and majesty. A return to the aesthetics and ethos of the medieval epoch also featured robustly in the Romantic sensibility. It went back in time in order to construct a particular relationship with the mythic past.

The Romantic Movement had its roots in an altered attitude towards human kind. For many writers of this age something radically new was happening in the world affairs. The world was changing to a different order quite distinct from the previous centuries. The eighteenth century aesthetics saw the poet as a spokesman of his society addressing a cultivated audience and directing them towards truth of general nature. The romantics found the material for their poetry in particular and unique experience. Romantic poetry was a response to the classical, contemplative poetry of neoclassicism. Neoclassical literature made use of classical model, tried to imitate nature, laid emphasis on moral categories and didacticism. Romanticism presents us with dreamlike world and rejoices in myth. It defies ordinary moral categories. Romanticism celebrates the fundamental forces of nature, depicting nature as out of control. With it nature becomes an object of contemplation, not, as it had been, something either to keep away from or to be in charge of. When the unmanageable

\[\text{Ibid., p. 24.}\]
nature is compared to life, it makes people think life should be uncontainable; life should be incessantly on the edge. Poetry came to be regarded as having its own ingrained truth and the sincerity of a poet was given supreme importance. They believed in living life to its lees, and to live with enthusiasm and vigor was to be one with the living God. Life came to be seen as a gift from God to be cherished and valued. Poetry came to be thought as something ephemeral coloring human life with a visionary gleam. According to Harold Bloom, "... the Romantic assertion is not just an assertion; it is a metaphysic, a theory of history, and much more important than either of these, it is what all of the Romantics - but Blake in particular – called a vision, a way of seeing, and of living, a more human life."\(^5\)

One can trace strong influences of the American and French revolutions on the movement, because the revolutionary energy was at the core of Romanticism. It can be taken as a synonym for rebellion. Romanticism rejected absolute systems of philosophy, politics and religion, and favored the idea of each person creating a subjective system. It strongly opposed all the organizations which thought that their doctrines and fundamentals were the only truths to be followed and obeyed. The romantics believed that Nature has invested every person with the knack to create his own world and exult in his own potential. Romantics showed distrust towards society because they believed it to be essentially corrupt and artificial. The false civilization of the modern world came to be seen as a greatest threat to the essential blessedness of humankind. They pleaded for the change in social world to make men happier. Many reforms like healthier treatment of the people in detention centers, less death penalties for minor crimes, and an increase in altruistic institutions, were

recommended. They stated that every person has right to life, liberty, and equal opportunity. Romanticism was a democratic movement where every individual came to be regarded as indispensable for the whole community of mankind. For Romanticists the simple and humble life was the best. The movement was inherently anti-progress if progress meant setting up factories and industries and ruining nature. Romantics believed in the natural goodness of humans which is spoiled by the urban life of civilization. They believed that the man who lives in the lap of nature all the time, for all intents and purposes, is noble as he regularly interacts with the elemental forces of nature. The romantics also took a great interest in supernatural and paranormal. They had a fascination for the mysterious and the unreal. They were fond of writing about ghosts, fairies etc. The unconscious mind got its way into the creative endeavors and the dreams and reveries were given their due importance. Romanticism believed that there were crucial areas of experience neglected by the rational mind. Poets started emphasizing on the childlike and primitive view of the world.

Romantics grew steadily as a group sharing ideas and beliefs. No one particular Romantic writer expressed all these ideas, but each believed enough of them to set him apart from earlier writers. Before the Romantic Movement burst into full expression there were beginners and experimenters. Progressively independent of aristocratic patronage, they saw themselves as liberated spirits expressing their own imaginative truths. The controlled equilibrium valued in 18th-century culture was cast off in support of emotional intensity, often taken to extremes of ecstasy. Nostalgia for childhood and the past, horror, melancholy, or sentimentality came to be valued. Some of these Pre-Romantic writers cultivated the taste for the unusual, the strange, or the morbid. Almost all of them showed a new interest in the irrational realms of dream and hallucination and of folk superstition and legend. The creative imagination
occupied the centre of their views of art, which replaced the ‘mechanical’ rules of conventional form with an ‘organic’ principle of natural growth and free development. James Thomson (1700-1748) took a deep interest in nature. His poem, “The Seasons” (1730) evokes interest in the process of nature. He is awed by the dreadful features of nature such as floods and storms. He as a poet paints the exquisite pictures of landscape. He speaks in detail about the deep relation between man and Nature in “The Seasons”. The extreme variety and beauty of Nature enchants him and moves him profoundly. William Collins (1721-1759) had a great impact on almost all the Romantic Poets. To him landscape gives birth to ideas and emotions. He is drawn close to Nature at twilight. His “Ode to Evening” is the precursor of Keats’ “To Autumn”. Romantic features such as a return to the past and anti-intellectualism may be seen in his “Ode on Popular Superstitions”. Coleridge was greatly impressed with the way Collins made use of Superstitions and classical legends. Thomas Gray (1716-71) in his very famous poem “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” pays attention to nature and humble life and these are the themes which were very dear to the Romantic poets. Gray’s later poetry indicates the shift towards medieval literature and Scandinavian folklore. His letters anticipate the Romantic love for scenery and nature. He writes about the varied moods of nature in charming detail. Such descriptions paved the way for Wordsworth’s memorable descriptions of nature. Robert Burns (1759-1796) wrote love songs in which he celebrated love of nature and freedom. As well as making original compositions, Burns also collected folk songs from across Scotland, often revising or adapting them. Many of Burns’ most famous poems are songs with the music based upon older traditional songs. He scorned false pretensions of wealth and birth. He wrote in the dialect of common people and talked about simple and familiar everyday matters. His songs are emotionally charged and they
resemble folk songs in their intensity. William Cowper (1731-1800) raged against the brutality of slavery and political oppression. He was a poet and a great exponent of hymns. He can be considered a transitional figure in English poetry whose works represent both eighteenth and nineteenth-century styles and concerns. Cowper continues to be regarded for the spontaneity and simplicity of his nature lyrics, the solemn, personal tone of his religious poetry, and the wit embodied in his satires and correspondence. He wrote about day to day life and highlighted the scenes of English landscape. William Godwin (1756-1836) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) were severe social critics and social rebels. Godwin attacked political institutions and detested aristocratic privilege. He was a proponent of mystery novel. Wollstonecraft was an advocate of women’s rights. She was one of the founding feminist philosophers and had an unorthodox life style. Mary Wollstonecraft was also the author of a remarkable Romantic work, Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark (1796). James Macpherson (1736-1796), a Scotsman, composed a detailed epic poem full of romantic vitality and passion. He collected Scottish Gaelic poetry and is accredited as the translator of Ossian cycle of poems. Macpherson produced works of literature which by their deep appreciation of natural beauty and the melancholy tenderness of their treatment of the ancient myth and legend did a lot to aid the Romantic Movement to grow and flourish. Thomas Percy (1729-1811) collected old English songs and ballads. His “Reliques of Ancient English Poetry” helped stimulate interest in the ballads and songs of medieval England. Its publication initiated a universal interest in earlier literary forms and exercised a great influence on the romantic poets in Germany as well as England. The Reliques consists of one hundred and eighty ballads in three volumes with three sections in each. It contains very important and famous ballads such as The Ballad of
Chevy Chase, The Battle of Otterburn, Lillibulloe, The Dragon of Wantle, The Nut-Brown Maid and Sir Patrick Spens. Not only would it inspire poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth to compose their own ballads in imitation, it also made the collecting and study of ballads a popular activity. The book is also credited, in part, with changing the current art movement of the 18th century, Neoclassicism, into Romanticism. The Reliques highlighted the traditions and folklore of England seen as simpler and less artificial.

To give a definite direction to all this progress towards romanticism in England came William Blake, who is by all critical standards the first great romantic. William Blake grew up in a world that was going through remarkable changes. The second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the initial stages of industrialization in Britain which later culminated in the Industrial Revolution. Industrial Revolution was responsible for making the plight of the poor and uneducated even more desolate and desperate. Old, young and children all equally were constrained to work long hours in factories, mills, and coalmines. They had to work under hazardous and appalling conditions for a scanty remuneration. There were many significant events that unfolded during Blake’s early life outside his home land. The most important amongst them were the American War of Independence in 1775 and the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. These events appealed to Blake’s political radicalism, for he strongly believed in the liberation and freedom of the human spirit. Blake wrote poems about both these historical events. Though it is tough to categorize Blake’s work in single genre he profoundly influenced the romantic poets with his recurring themes of good and evil, heaven and hell, knowledge and innocence and external reality in opposition to inner truth. Blake turned back to Elizabethan and early seventeenth-century poets, and other eighteenth-century poets outside the tradition of
Alexander Pope and the Metaphysical school. He was quite different from the romantic writers who immediately came after him owing to the intensity of his visions and peculiar nature which earned him the epithet of being mad. He was considered mad for his seemingly eccentric views by his contemporaries, but later criticism regards Blake highly for his expressiveness and creativity, as well as the philosophical and mystical undercurrents within his work. His paintings and poetry can be characterized as part of both the Romantic Movement and "Pre-Romantic", for its mostly having appeared in the 18th Century. The seeds of romantic thought which later on blossomed into a vast garden in the hands of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats were all found in Blake's poetry. Blake's love of nature and childhood was taken to tremendous heights by Wordsworth and his revolutionary and mythological vision was shared by Shelley. The shades of his political awareness and his interest in the politics of his time found its adherent in Byron. Blake's love of ideal beauty saw its great exponent in Keats. His prying into the mysteries of the familiar as well as unfamiliar world and his love for supernatural found its prophet in Coleridge. Though he was unique among romanticists, the transition from neoclassicism to romanticism comes full circle in his writings. The shift from neoclassicism to romanticism in his poetry is so smooth that it instills awe and wonder. As Harold Bloom says:

Blake preceded the other Romantics, and never identified himself with them...

All this aside, Blake and these others can be read more richly in each other's company, for their problem, theme, and central resource are nearly as one. Though he began earlier, in the time of Cowper and Gray, the poetry of Blake
reaches further into the present than that of Wordsworth, and may be more prophetic of the future.⁶

Many scholars are of the view that Romantic period began with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798. *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) was published with the aim to reject Augustan poetry and the authors gave more importance to direct speech derived from folk traditions. Both poets were also involved in utopian social thought in the wake of the French Revolution. But the host of other literary scholars situate the start of romantic period around 1785. They name Burns, Collins, Mary Wollstonecraft, Cowper, Thomas Percy etc. and especially mention Blake as the originator of Romanticism in England. Peter J. Kitson firmly believes that it is Blake who started the Romantic Movement in England.

By critical consensus the Romantic poets are the six male poets: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron. Together, it has been argued, they formed a literary and artistic movement known as ‘Romanticism’, which marked a profound shift in sensibility.⁷

He further writes:

Traditionally Romanticism was seen to begin around the time of the Revolution in France and to develop certain stylistic and linguistic innovations. These innovations are reflected in the works of a number of writers. William Blake produced his prophetic and apocalyptic illuminated books during the 1790s. Blake’s personal vision, expressed in a highly

symbolic language and form, was seen by many to inaugurate a new kind of revolutionary writing.\footnote{Ibid., p. 329.}

However, Kitson accepts the fact that there is no critical consensus about the exact dates when this movement began in England.

Literary starting points for the romantic period are difficult to determine; however, the period is often described as covering the years between the 1780s and 1830s, although some critics may refer back to the 1760s and other forward to around 1850 as significant dates.\footnote{Ibid., p. 327.}

All said and done William Blake stands out as a figure to be reckoned with in the history of both the poetry and visual arts of the English Romantic era. He was an individualist and this led to his isolation from society. He refused to compromise on the matters of personal and spiritual freedom for everyone. Blake searched for a spiritual reality and a truth that could only be achieved by taking help of feelings and the imagination and using these faculties to the utmost limit. He believed that man originated from a spiritual kingdom, and was born as a free spirit. It is because of the profoundly harmful influence from the earth itself, that man got ensnared in the limitations of his physical body and the five senses, which narrowed his ability for discernment. The only way to be freed from this confinement was by what he called "Imagination", the capacity to apprehend realities outside the prison of the corporeal world. Throughout his life Blake embraced the imagination as both divine and human reality. Blake’s internal world of imagination was a prime motivator for him throughout his life. His works are highly expressive and creative interspersed with
philosophical, mystical and spiritual thoughts. The greatest refuge for him was in the spiritual realm which for him was to be discovered living within the physical realities of this world. The muse who dictated to Blake was the inhabitant of the world of spirit. In the opinion of Northrop Frye, “To Blake, the spiritual world was a continuous source of energy; he harnessed spiritual power as an engineer harnesses water power and used it to drive his inspiration: he was a spiritual utilitarian.”

He respected the Bible but opposed the Church of England. He was greatly influenced by the ideals and aspirations of the French and American Revolutions. The doctrines put forth by Jacob Bohme and Emanuel Swedenborg had a great impact on him. In fact he lived during a time of intense change. The changes at political, social, economic and cultural levels in his era gave Blake an opportunity to see the transformation of the western world from a practically feudal, agricultural society to an industrial society. He observed the changes which transformed the whole world order of his times very minutely. From the very childhood he saw England witnessing a radical alteration at political, social, economic and cultural level. He used his poetic gifts to echo the changes which took England of his times by storm. He lived his age in his works despite carving out his own unique way of expression. J. Bronowski has something pertinent to say:

William Blake is to me the poet whose work and whose life expresses most sensitively the moving changes of that age. He more than any other had the ambitions of simple men, spoke out of their difficult dilemmas, and suffered their neglect. His poetry and his designs belong to the Romantic Revival, and his life and his friends (as well as the men he hated) belong to the Industrial revolution. He was a man of new stamp, self taught, lonely, awkward, with

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none of the graces of the poets of the Augustan establishment; and he broke their formal tradition to pieces.\textsuperscript{11}

William Blake was born in London, where he spent most of his life. As a young boy he wandered the streets of London and could easily escape to the surrounding countryside. His early life was dominated by spiritual visions which influenced both his personal and professional life. As a young boy he had a most revealing vision of seeing angels and other supernatural beings. He used to have fantastic visions and asserted even having a direct vision of God. He would also in the later stage in his life claim that he had regular conversations with his deceased brother Robert. He used to dream about the great prophets of past ages. He lived as if in the company of fairies. Mona Wilson records: “When he was only four years old God ‘put his head to the window’ and set him a-screaming; angels walked among the hay-makers one summer morning, and Mrs. Blake saved him from his father’s wrath, when at the age of eight or so, he spoke of seeing a tree on Peckham Rye starred with angels, though she was less lenient to a latter vision of Ezekiel.”\textsuperscript{12} His parents were broadly sympathetic with his artistic temperament. They encouraged and supported his creative endeavors and thus began his education and development as an artist. He had early shown his curiosity and propensity for drawing, so at the age of ten, Blake entered Henry Pars’ drawing school. Then, at the age of fourteen he started a seven year apprenticeship with engraver James Basire, the authorized engraver to the society of Antiquaries. He was frequently sent out to create sketches and drawings of statues, paintings and monuments including those found in churches like Westminster Abbey. The passionate study of Gothic art and architecture appealed to the aesthetic sensibility of

Blake and brought out his zest for the Medieval. He also met some very famous figures from London’s intellectual circles during this time. He started work as an engraver at an early age and then attended the Royal Academy but owing to his rebellious nature found the atmosphere stifling and clashed with the academy’s founding members, especially Sir Joshua Reynolds. According to Peter J. Kitson, “...Blake decried the stultifying influence of those like Reynolds who prescribed rules for art.”

It was as a journeyman engraver that Blake earned his living. Booksellers engaged him to engrave illustrations for publications ranging from novels such as Don Quixote to serials such as Ladies’ Magazine. Blake had a pure heart and spoke his mind freely, so much so that people thought of him as mad. He started writing poetry at the age of twelve, and in 1783 his friend paid for his first collection of verses to be printed, which was entitled Poetical Sketches. While Blake was busy with the host of things he was required to do as part of his commissions, he also undertook the assignment of creating the engravings that would illustrate his own poetry. Blake showed his disappointment from the very boyhood of his towards the current state of poetry and drabness of contemporary thought. His first work Poetical Sketches echoes influences from Spenser to the eighteenth century but at the same time it demonstrates his eagerness to experiment with the form and language of poetry. Northrop Frye states:

Though not in the canon, ‘Poetical Sketches’ is of the highest importance to us, partly because it shows Blake’s symbolic language in an emergent and transitional form, and partly because it confirms our point that Blake is organically part of his literary age. Chatterton, Ossian, Goldsmith, Percy, Collins and to a lesser extent Thomson and Gray, Gothic horror, the charnel

13 English Literature in Context, p. 316.
house and the graveyard, Primitivism, northern antiquities, oligarchic mercantilism, the renewed appreciation of Renaissance poetry, all find echoes of one kind or another here.  

It is an anthology of youthful verse and amid its conventional, imitative elements are indications of his latter original style and theme. Some of the poems contained in it have freshness, purity of vision and a lyric intensity one can hardly find in English poetry since the 17th century. These poems reveal the basic ideas characterizing the nineteenth century Romantic poetry.

*Poetical Sketches* starts with a poem titled “To Spring”. This beautiful romantic poem is an apostrophe to spring. The poet praises spring for its beauty and for its benevolent effects on all living things. Poet calls spring holy and wants it to approach his land. Poet’s land is shorn and devoid of the feelings of love and he has full faith that the coming of spring will bring with it elements of love and passion. He addresses the Spring as a person with moist tresses who looks down on the earth through the clear windows of the morning. She turns her beatific eyes towards the western island, whose crowded life is full of songs and merriment. The hills around seem to communicate with each other and the valleys are listening peacefully with interest. All the inhabitants of the earth with their craving eyes turn up to her bright tent. Blake invites the season of Spring to come over to the Eastern Hills and let their seasonal winds kiss and feel her sweet smelling attire. Let all life on earth experience both her morning and evening breath. He wants her to disperse her pearls of natural beauty upon their yearning land which is in mourning. Blake passionately appeals to spring to decorate his love sick land with ornaments using her fair fingers. He appeals

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her to put the golden crown upon the languished head of his land which has undergone neglect and experienced prolonged apathy, suffering, hardship and distress. He wants spring to embrace and crown his land. The nature imagery of this poem is very subtle and beautiful:

Come o’er the eastern hills, and let our winds
Kiss thy perfumed garments; let us taste
Thy morn and evening breath; scatter thy pearls
Upon our love-stricken land that mourns for Thee.\(^{15}\)

The song ‘How Sweet I roamed from field to field’ is a lamentation on the loss of liberty. For Blake freedom is of utmost value. The hypocritical values of this world and the pretences with which people are laced make an innocent creature captive and mock his loss of freedom. This poem has been written in a romantic vain. Its diction is simple, setting is pastoral and emotions are part of the action. This poem is highly lyrical and generates a serene music. This poem has a correlation with its later counterpart, Keats’ “La Belle Dame Sans Mercy”. The second stanza of this poem reads like:

He showed me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow;
He led me through his gardens fair,
Where all his golden pleasures grow.\(^{16}\)

Keats writes in the same style and rhythm and as if emulates the structural simplicity of Blake’s Song in his “La Belle Dame Sans Mercy”:

\(^{15}\) Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, ed. *Blake’s Poetry and Designs* (New York: Norton, 1979) 2.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid., P. 4.
I made a garland for her head,

And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;

She looked at me as she did love,

And made sweet moan.

I set her on my pacing steed,

And nothing else saw all day long,

For sidelong would she bend, and sing

A faery's song.\(^{17}\)

The poem “To the Muses” is an address to the muses of poetry. Blake laments the loss of good old spontaneous poetry. He laments that the muse has forsaken poets and left them devoid of the grace and majesty which it bestowed on old poets. The poetry has grown mechanical and dull. He shows his opposition to the neoclassical creed of dry, static and labored poetry. He praises the poetry of great ancient writers which is full of passionate feelings, sublime emotions and is spontaneous and natural. Wordsworth, many years after Blake in his famous Preface to Lyrical Ballads criticized the poetic diction employed by neoclassical writers. He like Blake was lamenting the loss of spontaneity and creativity in the poetry of the writers like Pope and Dryden. Blake quite in the same fashion as the author of the Preface wants a shift from the hackneyed style to a new and fresh style. He addresses to the Muse:

How have you left the ancient love

That bards of old enjoyed in you!

The languid strings do scarcely move!

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The sound is forced, the notes are few.\(^1\)

"To Autumn" is a poem where Blake praises autumn for its fruits and flowers. It is a season of fulfillment. Autumn is the season when life itself is in full bloom. It is a season of ripeness. The imagery and the figures of speech employed by Blake are very apt and beautiful. The poem creates a romantic atmosphere and the poet exults in the sense of accomplishment that autumn has left the golden load of fruits and flowers.

The narrow bud opens her beauties to

The sun and love runs in her thrilling veins;

Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and

Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,

Till clust’ring Summer breaks forth into singing,

And feather’d clouds strew flowers round her head.\(^2\)

This poem seems to be a forerunner of the Keats’ “Ode to Autumn”. Keats in the same fashion as Blake writes:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,

Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

Conspiring with him how to load and bless

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;

To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,

And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

\(^1\) Blake’s Poetry and Designs, P. 9.

\(^2\) ibid., p. 2.
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cell.²⁰

“Fair Elenor” is a poem charged with supernatural atmosphere. This is a special example of Dark poetry and a dark themed poem. The forces of death and darkness run throughout the poem. It has a medieval touch and it is full of mystery and suspense. It reads like an old Gothic poem. This poem reminds us of Coleridge’s poems, especially “Christabel”.

The bell struck one, and shook the silent tower;
The graves give up their dead: Fair Elnor
Walked by the castle gate, and looked on.
A hollow groan ran thro’ the dreary vaults.²¹

The song ‘I love the jocund dance’ is a celebration of the feelings of love which the poet harbors for everything beautiful like dance, music, nature, beauty etc. His love of countryside and rural life is also evident in this poem. He sings like a child lost in meditating the beautiful landscape of countryside. The second stanza reads like:

I love the laughing vale,
I love the echoing hill,
Where mirth does never fail,
And the jolly swain laughs his fill.²²

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²² *Blake’s Poetry and Design*, p. 5.
The song “Memory hither come” shows poet’s love for sorrow which is a typical romantic trait. The poet feeds on pure nature and exults in melancholy as it is food for his thought. This poem evokes a feeling of nostalgia as one is lead to think about the golden ages of the distant past when man used to live permanently in the company of nature and lived a life of perfect freedom and liberty at ease with the fundamental elements of nature.

I’ll drink of the clear stream,
And hear the linnet’s song;
And there I’ll lie and dream
The day along;
And when night comes, I’ll go
To places fit for woe,
Walking along the darken’d valley
With silent Melancholy. 23

After the bright dawn of Poetical Sketches came the Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794). In these songs the world is seen from a child’s point of view directly, simply and innocently. These songs demonstrate that a change has occurred in Blake’s political thought as well as in his literary expression. These songs have simple, sweet and powerful language. Their language and form are most strikingly original and it is very difficult to find one or their kind in the western literary tradition. They are a cause enough to regard Blake as one of the earliest and greatest figures of Romanticism. They differ radically from the seemingly imitative pastoral mode of Poetical Sketches. These songs remind us of popular street ballads.

23 Ibid., p. 6.
and rhymes of children and are modeled on them but it is Blake’s superior intelligence and genius which helped him to transmute these forms into some of the purest lyrical poetry in English literature. These songs talk about the contraries of human nature and show Blake’s use of romantic themes and elements at the best. These songs contrast the innocent, pastoral world of childhood against an adult world of corruption and repression. Kitson says, “Blake’s concern with the dialectic of two stages of life, innocence and experience, through which the individual must pass has come to be regarded as a deeply Romantic Notion.”

Songs of Innocence and Experience is the tangible expression of his conviction that innocence and experience are “the two contrary states of the human soul,” and it is experience only which makes true innocence possible. Songs of Innocence consists of poems either composed from the standpoint of children or written about them. Most of the poems appearing in Songs of Innocence have a counterpart in Songs of Experience, with quite a distinct view of the world. The disastrous consequences of the French Revolution caused Blake to lose faith in the goodness of humankind and it is this loss of certitude which explains much of the despair and cynicism found in Songs of Experience. Blake also believed that children lost their innocence through exploitation by religious organizations which valued dogma instead of mercy. He did not, however, believe that children should be kept from becoming experienced entirely. In fact, he believed that children should indeed become experienced but through their own discoveries, which is reflected in a number of these poems.

The very first poem of Songs of Innocence called “Introduction” shows Blake’s love for and interest in countryside, innocence (in the form of a child), and also his belief in the supreme power of imagination. Blake presents the poet in the form of a

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24 English Literature in Context, p. 337.
simple shepherd. This poem gives Blake a status of a pioneer romantic poet. This poem emanates a spiritual glow as it deals with the happy, carefree and blissful child who symbolizes innocence in its very pure state. Blake is seen illuminating the qualities of the state of innocence. In this poem Blake is at his creative best. The poem itself is a plea for a spontaneous nature of writing. Poetry comes and descends on the imaginative faculty of a poet in the form of a song without any straining of intellect.

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

‘Pipe a song about a Lamb!’
So I piped with merry cheer.
‘Piper, pipe that song again.’
So I piped: he wept to hear.

‘Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
Sing thy songs of happy cheer:’
So I sung the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

‘Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read.’
So he vanish’d from my sight;
And I pluck’d a hollow reed,
And I made a rural pen,
And I stained the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.⁵⁵

“The Echoing Green” presents a pastoral world. The atmosphere is that of mutual love and understanding. The children are playing and happy in the lap of nature. The elder people are there to take care of them. Seeing them play they get nostalgic about their own childhood. This poem is in fact a detailed exploration of the cycle of life. What is happening on the Green will happen again as it is shown by the ‘old folk’ who watch the children and are reminded of their own childhood on the Green. The poet marvels at the God’s creation of children who are innocence incarnate. The first stanza sets the tone:

The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies;
The merry bells ring
To welcome the spring;
The skylark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells’ cheerful sound,
While our sports shall be seen
On the Echoing green.⁶⁶

⁵⁵ Blake’s Poetry and Designs, P. 19.
⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 20.
*Songs of Experience* presents a vision contrary to *Songs of Innocence*. This book also opens with a poem called “Introduction”. Here the voice of the poet is that of the ancient Bard and that also of the biblical prophet who has heard the ‘Holy Word’, the word of God. The Bard reiterates the call of the Holy Word to fallen man. The message repeated by the Bard is that man still ‘might control’ the world of nature and bring back the ‘fallen light’ of vision. Blake believes that the concern for the substance led to the fall of man. The poet as well as God wants man to leave the world of materialism and turn once again to the world of imagination. For Blake imagination is a great rescuer. In the world of experience men tend to come under the sway of reason and hence lose their spirituality. Blake wants people to gain spirituality in order to unite again with the divine.

Hear the voice of the Bard,
Who present, past, and future, sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walked among the ancient tree;

Calling the lapsed soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might control
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

"O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass!"
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous mass.

"Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor,
The watery shore,
Is given thee till the break of day."\(^{27}\)

"Earth's Answer" is a poem where Earth responds back. She says that the selfish God of materialism has chained her and led her astray. The earth wants back the state of freedom and she beseeches the benevolent God to set her free from the chains of reason. Blake comes out as an advocate of free love. He detested clergy for stifling the natural love of man for woman. Here I quote the relevant lines from the poem.

............... 
Can delight,
Chained in night.
The virgins of youth and morning bear?

"Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around!
Selfish, vain,
Eternal bane,

That free love with bondage bound.\textsuperscript{28}

"The Tygr" is a romantic revolutionary poem par excellence. Here the poet marvels at the acumen of God. He is surprised that God, who has made a ferocious animal like tiger, has also made an innocent creature like lamb. So, good and evil are the creation of the same power. Yet, how man understands God depends on man's view of God's divinity. Blake is building on the conventional thought that nature, like a work of art, must in some way contain a mirror image of its creator. The poem consists of unanswered questions, and the poet leaves us to awe at the sheer enormity of God's power, and the inscrutability of divine will. Blake's analysis is a variation on an old philosophical and theological question: Why does evil live on in a universe created and ruled by a munificent and compassionate God? Blake provides no answer. His task is to reflect reality in striking images. A poet's first intention, after all, is to present the world and its denizens in language that stimulates the aesthetic sense; he is not to exhort or moralize. The poem is more about the creator of the tiger than it is about the tiger itself. In contemplating the terrible ferociousness and awesome symmetry of the tiger, the speaker is at a loss to explain how the same God who made the lamb could make the tiger. Humans are incapable of fully understanding the mind of God and the mystery of his creation. Blake gives free flow to his romanticism and mysticism as he examines the metaphysics of creation and the ultimate union of good and evil in one being – be that God itself or its human manifestation.

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright

In the forests of the night,

\textsuperscript{28}ibid., p. 41.
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?
And what shoulder, and what art.
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?
What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?
When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee? 29

The two short prose pieces “All Religions are One” and “There Is No Natural Religion” show Blake raging against the philosophy of Bacon, Newton and Locke. In “All Religions are One” Blake is seen rejecting the eighteenth century deism or natural religion which thought God’s existence can be discovered with the evidences found in the material world. Blake is of the view that the imaginative faculty alone helps us to reach God. It is the discovery of self which underlie all religions. This

29 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
prose piece is an argument for the primacy of imagination over all metaphysical and moral systems. According to Blake all men are one in their imagination, so all the religions of the world are one in their essence. All religions of the world have a common source and a common goal. Through aphoristic pronouncements Blake campaigns for the fundamental harmony of all religions as expressions of the ‘Poetic Genius’ within all human beings. In “All Religions Are One,” Blake portrays the results of his quest for truth and outlines his faith in the universality of the Poetic Genius and other elements of his unique religious convictions. Blake criticizes all the institutions which believe in the difference of religions. He ousts reason from its supreme place and replaces it with imagination.

Blake says in Principle 1st:

That the Poetic Genius is the true Man, and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius.  

In Principle 7th Blake says:

As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various), So all Religions, as all similars, have one source. The true Man is the source, he being the Poetic Genius.

“There is no Natural Religion” consists of two series contradicting each other. In the first series Blake says men are physical and are limited by their senses. The first series employs irony as it satirizes Enlightenment philosophers for their undue emphasis on reason. In the first, Blake states basic principles, derived from the philosophy of John Locke and his followers, about physical perception, reason, and the limits of

50 Ibid., p. 13.  
knowledge. The second series redefines and confutes the first and argues for the 
infinitude of spiritual perceptions. Blake is of the view that believing our senses and 
reason only, makes us dull and passive, and it is only poets and prophets who save us 
from this dry philosophy by opening the window into the world of imagination. In the 
second series Blake presents the point of view he himself believes in. He says that 
men perceive more than senses can discover and are infinite like God. He insists on 
Man’s potential infinitude. Blake believes that Man’s soul and his intuition helps him 
to see beyond the visible and the present. Man is the image of God itself because both 
are limitless. The only reason people believe in natural religion is that they are 
unwilling to believe in the unity of God and Man. In the second series of “There is No 
Natural Religion” Blake says:

Man’s perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he perceives 
more than sense (tho’ ever so acute) can discover.  

Blake further states:

The desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite & himself 
Infinite.

Finally Blake’s epic poems, prophetic books and prophecies are an amalgam of 
poetry, visionary prophecy and exhortation. They include The Book of Thei(1789), 
The French Revolution(1791), The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Vision of Daughters 
of Albion(1793), America. a Prophecy(1793), The First Book of Urizen(1794), 
Europe. a Prophecy(1794), The Song of Los(1797), The Book of Ahania(1795), The 
Book of Los(1795), Vala or The Four Zoas(1795-1804), Milton, a poem in 2 books

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32 Ibid., p. 15.
33 Ibid., p. 15.
(1804-08), Jerusalem(1804-20) and some other lesser known works. In these books Blake presents a vision of whole human life. The instinct, energy and imagination are shown as struggling with the forces of oppression. In these books he records his life long concern with the struggle of the soul to free its natural form from reason and organized religion. In his The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Blake writes:

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

He further says:

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,  
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?

Blake further states:

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narow chinks of his cavern.

Blake went on writing and painting till his death and after his death his influence grew steadily and reached pre-Raphaelite poets and later on T S Eliot and W B Yeats embraced his mythological and esoteric vision. His art had been too adventurous and unconventional for the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. In certain ways he was ahead of his time. Mona Wilson says, “... the revolution which poetry was to achieve in the last years of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the

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34 Ibid., p. 87.  
36 Ibid., p. 93.
nineteenth, …, Blake carried through in his own work, unknowing and unknown.”

He broke away from the enlightenment tradition of writing poetry and pioneered a new sensibility which later flourished as a Romantic Movement in English art and letters. In the words of Northrop Frye: “The Augustan process of developing a poetic tradition within a civilized environment no longer appealed to a poet who wanted to recapture for himself the primary creative mood in which the more sublime visions of earlier ages had been produced.” He was writing at a time when the Age of Reason was turning into Age of Enthusiasm. He had a naïve and almost arrogant confidence in the power of his own inspiration. According to Mona Wilson, “The poetry of Blake is self-begotten: it lived to itself without influence on the world; it might have perished without record. And yet it promises — and often realizes — whatever is new and significant in the poetry which was to declare itself twenty years later and to reign unchallenged from that time onward.”

All the traits of Romanticism are amply found in Blake’s poetry. Blake was a romantic in his incessant admiration of Imagination. His mysticism, symbolism, lyricism, his love of freedom and liberty, his love for children and rural life, his rebellious nature all combine to give him a pre-eminent place as a forerunner of British Romanticism. Blake was representative poet of Romanticism as he believed in the exaltation of the artist, always in quest of the absolute. Both his poems and paintings are imaginative and symbolic with a spiritual message surpassing any other poet writing in the same vein. He had an unquenchable thirst for the complete integration of man, in his entire nature, with the universe. Blake was a supreme creator. He was a pioneer Romantic who like all other first generation romantic

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37 The Life of William Blake, p. 9.
39 The Life of William Blake, pp. 9-10.
writers thought and firmly believed that the blazes of the French Revolution would burn down all iron chains. He was an inspired rebel. From any conservative perspective Blake was too different a person to be related easily to familiar conception of the nature of the individual and society. Blake rejected neoclassical prejudices and prefigured Romanticism exercising complete faith in mystic intuition and showing distrust in reason. Blake created his own mythology and with its help denounced the recently born positivism and the enslaving church. It helped him to promote imagination, energy and reconcile evil with good. Blake wrote in Jerusalem: “I must create a system or be enslaved by another Man’s. I will not Reason and compare: My business is to create.” He hated the church’s dogma, money, the oppression of minorities and despised science. He raged against the powers repressing human possibilities. Blake fought against the church for its oppressive hypocrisy. According to J. Brownowski, “He was trying to make men give up systems, rationalist and religious alike. And he was trying ‘to converse daily as man with man’.” Blake started by smashing the fetters of neo-classical diction and style. He raged against the orthodox morality and dead tradition. Reason he believed was a great transgressor and the only way out was a complete faith in imagination. He looked within himself for the inspiration and material for his works. Blake exulted in the beauties of nature and provided some beautiful landscape portrayals through his poetry. Blake as a romantic was passionate believer in liberty and freedom for all, especially for women. Like a true seer he could see beyond the ordinary world and glimpse the light of the far beyond. Poets like Burns, Cowper, Gray, Thomson and Collins anticipated Romantic Movement but none of them was a one man institution like Blake incorporating all the traits of Romanticism taken as a broad movement in the history of English literary

40 *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, p.316.
41 *William Blake and the Age of Revolution*, p. 31.
thought. In fact, Blake was much ahead of his time as a man of new consciousness and he drew a sharp line dividing the olden neoclassical world whose representatives were poets like Alexander Pope from the new world of Romanticism whose chief harbinger he himself was. He is the only poet in whose works one can trace all the elements of Romanticism which were later on quite comprehensively found in the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. Natural emotions and individual novelty makes Blake a forerunner of the Romantic poetry of the 19th century. Blake was a literary genius who lived at the turn of the 18th century, hence a very early Romantic, but most genuinely a Romantic. The poems and prose works which consist of the bulk of his literary production give him the place as one of the fathers of Romanticism, one who defined the genre.
Chapter-2

Kahlil Gibran: Poet Laureate of Oriental Romanticism
Kahlil Gibran: Poet Laureate of Oriental Romanticism

Kahlil Gibran was born on January 6, 1883, in Besharri. It is a hilly and a mountainous area in Northern Lebanon. Psalmists have sung and poets have composed verses of exquisite beauty in praise of this place and the famous cedars which grow in the foothills of Mount Lebanon. Gibran’s family was very poor and for that reason, he had no formal early education. Nevertheless, he received a strong spiritual legacy from his ancestors. His mother came from a respected religious background. He was frequently visited by priests who taught him basics of Bible and other sacred scriptures. They also gave him lessons in Arabic and Syraic languages. One of the priests recognized Gibran’s inquisitive and observant nature quite early in his childhood and began teaching him the basic principles of language and letters. With the help of this early exposure to learning and language Gibran started exploring the world of history, science, art and literature with great interest and tremendous zeal. Gibran was very perceptive and insightful from the very early days of his youth. He grew up in the greenest and verdant region of Besharri and he loved to live in the company of nature from the very childhood. He was fascinated by the beauty and majesty of natural world surrounding him and he would spend most of his time observing the natural world. He was an introverted and contemplative child who relished and exulted in the beauty of cascades and mountains. Such was his love for nature that he would forget his meals and spend the whole days playing amidst the green cedars. All the natural wonders of his homeland fascinated him. In the words of Alexandre Najjar:

Can one say enough about the influence of Bscharri on Gibran? Everything: the sun, the storms, the shepherds, the wheat, the myrtle, the mist, the wind,
the streams, the ‘secret hills and songs of forests’, the plough, the flute, the reed, the gesticulations of the villagers who were selling, folding, stifling their merchandise... all of these images are inherent in each of his books, and in particular in The Prophet, where all the symbols find their origins in the author’s native village.¹

Gibran’s father was arrested in Lebanon for tax evasion and his property was confiscated. As a result his family was left homeless. Gibran’s family including his mother, his two sisters and his half brother, with the exception to his father moved to America in 1895. The motive behind this emigration was to guarantee a healthier prospect for the children and to have some economic security. The family settled in Boston’s South End. At that time this place provided a refuge to the second largest Syrian community in America after New York. The family was in an impoverished state and the pain which Gibran felt in these early years of immigration left a permanent mark on his mind. These experiences compelled him to visit his childhood memories again and again. Visiting his childhood memories he would try to dispel the dirt, the poverty and the humiliation of those difficult and harsh days. During the early period of his hard life and even after settling in America Gibran used to live quite in isolation from society. This intensified his already gloomy temperament. It was with his strong willed mother Kamileh’s help that he overcame his deep melancholic sadness. She took the responsibility of the whole family on her shoulders. She was very much aware of her son’s taste for art and literature, therefore, she allowed him to intermingle with Boston’s social life and discover its flourishing world of art and literature.

Although without formal education, which at that time was considered useless, if not dangerous, for women, she possessed an intelligence and wisdom that had an enormous influence on her younger son, who later said of her: 'It is her mothering me I remember – the inner me'. Fluent in Arabic and French and artistic and musical by temperament Kamileh ignited Kahlil's imagination with the folk tales and legends of Lebanon, and stories from Bible.²

Gibran’s inquisitiveness led him to discover the cultural side of Boston. He observed and took a profound interest in its thriving world. He frequently visited the theatre, opera and artistic galleries. His mother sent Gibran to a school meant for immigrants and later to an art school. His teachers came to appreciate his flair for art on noticing his primary drawings. It was his favorite activity from the very childhood and he would spend hours drawing pictures of different hues and colour. According to Suhel Bushruii and Joe Jenkins, “From an early age Kahlil was consumed by a love for drawing. If there was no paper to be found in the house he would go outside and spend hours sketching shapes and figures on the fresh snow.”³ Gibran joined school on September 30, 1895, just two months after his arrival in America. Since, he had no earlier formal schooling; he was admitted in an ungraded class which was meant for immigrant children. The class was ungraded because these children did not know anything about English language. In the school, a registration error changed the spelling and shortened his name forever from Gibran Khalil Gibran to Kahlil Gibran, which remained unchanged for the rest of his life.

In America itself, Gibran met an artist by the name of Fred Holland Day. In the words of Suhel Bushruii and Joe Jenkins:

³ Ibid., p. 30.
Fred Holland Day, one-time bibliophile, publisher, man of letters, and devotee of Oscar Wilde, was a leading light in bohemian Boston. During his thirty-six years he had explored many of the alternative fashions of his time. Flamboyant in appearance, Day had spent his working life challenging the conformist attitudes of his peers. He was infatuated with English literature and on his many visits to England had ardently collected literary and illustrative material, a pastime that was to earn him a reputation as an artistic bridge between American and English letters.⁴

Day was a great supporter of artists. He discovered Gibran’s enthusiasm and eagerness for literature and art. Day found him a natural genius and became his mentor. It was he who later in his life set him on the path to artistic renown and raised his self esteem. He introduced him to the writings of various famous writers which were quite in accord with Gibran’s literary taste and temperament and later on had a great impact on him. According to Paul Nassar, “It was Day who introduced Gibran to Blake, Shelley, Emerson, Whitman, and various turn-of-the century British, American, and continental poets.”⁵ It was under the guidance of Day that Gibran started exploring the world of Greek mythology, world literature, writings of contemporary authors and even photography. Day was extremely liberal, avant-garde, and unconventional. He believed in unregulated adoption of the strange for the sake of novelty and for his own personal interest. The temperament and personality of Day had a strong impact on Gibran who later on in his life came to abhor the conventional and the orthodox. He incessantly encouraged Gibran and helped him improve his

⁴Ibid., p. 45.
drawings and sketches. Quite early in his artistic career Gibran began to develop his own technique and style, encouraged by Day’s enthusiasm and wholehearted support. Slowly and steadily Gibran entered the Bostonian circles and his artistic talents brought him recognition at an early age. At this time his family decided to send Gibran back to Lebanon to finish his education and learn Arabic. In 1898, Gibran arrived in Beirut speaking poor English and even little Arabic. Though he could speak Arabic fluently, he was very poor at writing the language. To improve his Arabic, Gibran chose to register in the college by the name of Madrasat-al-Hikmah. This college offered a nationalistic curriculum which was limited to church writings, history and liturgy. Gibran because of his rebellious and individualistic nature, refused to follow this insular and inadequate curriculum. He asked for an individual curriculum which would cater to his educational needs and suit his artistic temperament. His overconfidence and pride was not less than a heresy keeping in view the orthodox mindset of the then society. However, the college accepted his demand and edited course material to Gibran's liking. He chose to engross himself in the Arabic-language Bible and was greatly impressed by its style and diction. The stylistic features of the holy Book reverberate in many of his works. In this college he read classical Arabic literature as well as modern Arabic Christian literature. Here, he also became fluent in French. Gibran’s teachers had a great liking for him because of his rebellious and unconventional nature as well as for his writing and artistic skills. He gained enough proficiency in Arabic and French at Madrasat-al-Hikmah and did very well in his studies and excelled in poetry. Gibran completed his studies in 1902 and he left Lebanon in the same year. After returning back to America Gibran met Mary Elizabeth Haskell who became his patron and tutor in English for two decades. She was a highly educated, resolute and independent woman and an active champion
of women’s emancipation. Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins writings about the relationship between Gibran and Haskell say, “...It was Mary Haskell, a school teacher from Carolina, his ‘guardian angel,’ who reassured him that he was ‘not a stranger in a strange land,’ and who became his patroness and confidante. ... Mary Haskell’s role is crucial to Gibran’s development that at times biographers find two destinies woven in one.” Mary was indeed a great help to Gibran in those hard and difficult years of his life. She supported him both financially as well as at an emotional level and after a while Gibran started enjoying her company and was most comfortable in her presence. She also provided Gibran with intellectual support. It was she who convinced Gibran to give up translating his Arabic works into English and focus instead on writing directly in English. Mary cooperated with Gibran in editing his various English works and helped polish Gibran’s work. She would spend hours with Gibran, examining his manuscripts, correcting his errors and even suggesting new ideas especially related to the linguistic aspects of his works. She also encouraged him to explore the treasures of English literature and Gibran read many great works of English literature in her company. English authors and poets highly impressed Gibran and he found them very enlightening. It was especially English Romantic poets who captivated his interest. He found that they mirrored his personality and his temperament. He found a perfect muse in them and they inspired him throughout his literary career.

Gibran, whose English was improving all the time, was awestruck when he heard the utterings of the great English poets, and his reverence for them remained with him all his life. He saw in Keats one of the ‘very few true worshippers of true Beauty – Beauty which is the only Truth .... [a] flame

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dancing in the immeasurable sky’; in Shelley: ‘a world by himself. His soul is that of an exiled god who, being sad and weary and homesick, passed the time singing his memory of other planets’; and in Blake the ‘God-man,’ whose work represented for Gibran ‘the profoundest things done in English – and his vision. . . the most godly. 7

From 1908 to 1910 Haskell provided resources for Gibran to study painting and drawing in Paris. Gibran was enthralled by the enormous French cultural panorama, and he spent his days and nights exploring and examining paintings at the various art museums and exhibitions. It is in Paris that Gibran met Auguste Rodin, the famous French artist who is generally considered to be the progenitor of modern sculpture. It is commonly believed that he saw some of Gibran’s paintings and appreciated them. And it was Rodin himself who as some biographers of Blake write, introduced him to Blake’s writings and called Gibran, ‘the William Blake of modern age’. Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins write, “In Paris Gibran met Rodin who introduced him to the art and poetry of William Blake. Gibran immediately felt a ‘kinship’ with the visionary Englishman, and the benign shadow of Blake was to fall on virtually all of his English writings, as well as many Arabic works.”8

In 1905, Al-Mahajar (The Emigrant), an émigré newspaper meant for Arabic speaking public, published his first Arabic book entitled Nudah Fi Fan al-Musiqa (On Music, a Pamphlet) which eulogizes music. A book in Arabic and translated into English by the name of Nymphs of Valley was published in 1906. The Nymphs of the Valley is a collection of three allegories having Northern Lebanon as their setting. The allegories – “Martha”, “Yuhanna the Mad”, and “Dust of Ages and the Eternal Fire”-

7 Ibid., p. 47.
8 Ibid., p. 5.
deal with subject matter pertaining to prostitution, religious persecution, rebirth and predetermined love. These allegories were profoundly influenced by the narratives he had heard during his childhood in his birth place Bsharri and by his own interest in the Bible and the spirituality. The nature of love as treated by Gibran also contributes to make this book profoundly solemn. This book also expresses the youthful writer's antagonism against feudal order and clerical institutions.

In autumn of 1906, Gibran published *The Nymphs of Valley*, an anthology of three allegorical stories in Arabic. ...The work coloured with romanticism, exposes themes dear to the author's heart: the greatness of Christ contrasted with the pettiness of the Clergy; madness as a source of truth and liberty; ...9

*Spirits Rebellious* is a compilation of four short stories and it was published in 1908. It is an early collection and the titles included are “Rose-AlHani”, “The Bridal Couch”, “The Cry of the Graves”, and “Khalil the Heretic.” All of these stories portray people who confront and resist authority and social tradition. The book censures the authority that both the church and the state force on people. The book was burned in Beirut for its revolutionary and anti-establishment thoughts. Najjar, referring to the book says, “It is a work marked with such commitment and romanticism, one is tempted to compare it to the works of Victor Hugo.”10 *The Broken Wings* published in Arabic in 1912 augmented Gibran's reputation in the Arabic world. The book is one of the longest of his Arabic books and it deals with the story of Selma Karameh’s ill-fated love affair with a young man, her subsequent marriage against her own wishes and her death as she gives birth to a dead child. This is Gibran's only novel. It is a delicate story of young love that vanishes away and is

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9 *Kahlil Gibran: Author of the Prophet*, p. 57.
10 Ibid., p. 63.
ruined by the evil forces of tradition, custom and ritual. Gibran angrily depicts the predicament of the Arab woman of his time. After the success of *The Broken Wings*, the Arabic daily Al-Fanun (The Arts) published Gibran’s collection of prose poems and essays entitled *A Tear and a Smile* and titled in later translations as *Tears and the Laughter*. It is an anthology of Gibran’s early newspaper prose poems and stories. The poet finds consolation in his tears and in the company of nature. He sings of his prophet-like role. Najar writes about the book, “The fifty-six articles are inspired by a humanistic outlook and contain reflections on life, love and the situation in Lebanon and Syria. Gibran was certainly one of the pioneers of poetic prose, a literary form that was still a novelty in Arabic literature.”

*Tears and Laughter* is full of romantic themes, ideas and aspirations. In the prose piece “Life of Love” the poet calls his beloved to be with him in all seasons so that they can share the rich banquet which pristine nature has to offer. He wants to appreciate the rich variety and beauty of nature in the company of his beloved. He calls his beloved so that they can both together enjoy the crystal clear features of beautiful nature. This prose poem reads like a romantic ode. It has all the beauty and splendor one can find in the odes of English romantics especially Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth. The language used by Gibran is simple and melodious. The message of Gibran in this prose piece is that love never dies. It grows stronger with the passing seasons. Peace can be attained only in close association with the beloved. If one wishes to live life in real terms, he is to live in the company of one’s beloved.

Come away my beloved, let us walk amid the knolls,

For the snow is water, and life is alive from its

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11 Ibid., p. 111.
Slumbers and is roaming the hills and valleys.
Let us follow the footprints of Spring into the
Distant fields, and mount the hilltops to draw
Inspiration high above the cool green plains.\textsuperscript{12}

In “The Play Ground of Life” Gibran expresses his view that one hour of true love and pursuit of beauty is as good as living a life of eternity. It is love and beauty which make life worth living. What is the use of struggle and what to strive for if our heart has not something beautiful to adore, worship and love? He says that restoring the confidence and peace of the weak is worth infinity. He believes that it is only our spiritual deeds which matter in the eyes of divine power. Here once again we come across Gibran’s romantic and transcendental thought currents which constituted the fabric of his personality.

One hour devoted to the pursuit of Beauty
And love is worth a full century of glory
Given by frightened weak to the strong.\textsuperscript{13}

In ‘The Poet’ Gibran exalts the poet and calls him divinely inspired. He believes that the poet’s character is chaste both within and without. Gibran believed that divine inspiration is necessary for a poet as he embarks upon writing about sublime thoughts and profound feelings. A poet acts as a bridge between men and gods. He spreads happiness and mirth everywhere. His message is full of hope. It acts as a balm on the wounds of suffering masses. The poet quenches the thirst and satisfies the hunger of craving hearts. This poem in its beauty resembles Shelley’s melodious lyrics. When

\textsuperscript{13} The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran, p. 26.
Gibran talks about poet as a solitary figure and lover of nature, we are reminded of Wordsworth’s and Shelley’s theory of poetry. Gibran talking about the poet writes:

He is a solitary figure, robed in simplicity and Kindness; He sits upon the lap of Nature to draw his Inspiration, and stay up in the silence of the night, Awaiting the descending of the spirit.¹⁴

He further writes:

He is a link between this and the coming world He is a pure spring from which all thirsty souls may drink. He is a tree watered by the River of Beauty, bearing Fruit which the hungry heart craves; He is a nightingale, soothing the depressed Spirit with the beautiful melodies.¹⁵

Wordsworth in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads says that poet quite instinctively loves solitude and peace and nature provides him with inspiration. Poetry comes to him spontaneously but he has to wait for the right moment. Wordsworth’s very famous words about poetry are: “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.”¹⁶ Gibran’s ideas related to poet and poetry are not different from Wordsworth’s ideas on poetry. Shelley’s concept of poet is also similar to Gibran’s. Shelley compares the poet with a nightingale and believes that the poet possesses a celestial power and he creates great melody by the help of words. Poetry transports by virtue of its rhythm, music and sublimity. Shelley writes in his A Defense of Poetry:

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 40.
¹⁵ Ibid., p. 39.
A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.  

“Yesterday and Today” is a story of a gold hoarder who compares his past with his present. In his past life he was a devotee of nature and lived a life of love and innocence. But his present state is one of greed and ambition. His past life was the life of peace but now he has grown restless with the increase in wealth. He was free when he had little but he is a slave now of his own pomp and wealth. This story seems to have a stamp of Songs of Innocence and Experience on it. For Blake innocence is a blissful state and experience is a state where man grows greedy, ambitious and restless. Innocence is allied with truth, sincerity and honesty; experience is related to falsehood, duplicity and corruption. The gold hoarder of the story says loudly

Yesterday I was grazing my sheep in the green valley, enjoying my existence, sounding my flute, and holding my head high. Today I am a prisoner of greed. Gold leads into Gold, then into restlessness, and finally into crushing misery.

Gibran wrote extensively in Arabic, because as a native of Lebanon, Arabic was his mother tongue and he also had learnt the language from great teachers at Madrasat al Hikmah. Living in America he achieved an expertise in English language and most of his writings and works published after 1918 are in English. As Gibran started writing in English, his mentor and close friend Mary Haskell was always there to encourage, help and guide him. The Madman: His Parables and Poems was published in 1918.

\[\text{17 Ibid., p. 699.}\]

\[\text{18 The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran, p. 58.}\]
Gibran had started working in 1913 on *The Madman* and he was preoccupied with the subject of madness from the very early age when he learned about the stories of how mad men were treated in Lebanon. He heard that in his hometown people who had gone mad were thought to be possessed by the spirit of the jinn (the devil) and the church had the sole authority for exorcizing the devil out of the haunted people. It was his first book originally published in English language. It contains illustrated parables and aphorisms and its tone is ironic, satirical and rebellious against erring human race and its transgressions. Gibran’s message in this book is that one should follow the inner voice of the self. This book is full of Sufi thoughts and these thoughts have been illustrated by Gibran in beautifully written allegorical tales and maxims. *The Forerunner: His Parables and Poems* followed in 1920 and is a reminder of the human being’s latent potential for progress towards a higher self. Like *The Madman: His Parables and Poems*, in this book also Gibran finds expression for his mystic thoughts and once again he makes ample use of parables and aphorisms.

With his immense contribution to the field of art and literature Gibran became best known of the “Mahajar poets” or the Immigrant Arabic writers. He became president of Arrabitah Al-Qalamyiah, a literary society founded in New York in 1920. Its aim was to infuse a new life in modern Arabic literature. Throughout the years that it was active, Arrabitah was guided by Gibran’s call for greater artistic autonomy as he always encouraged writers to smash the rules and seek out individual styles. The members of Arrabitah immensely praised lively Western ideas and rebelled against the dead traditional values in Arabic literature. In the words of Joseph P. Ghougassian: “On April 20, 1920, the immigrant Arabic writers headed by Gibran as their president, formed a literary circle called “Arbitah” (Pen Bond), whose purpose was to update Arabic literature ‘from the state of sterility and imitation to the state of beautiful
originality in both meaning and style."\textsuperscript{19} According to Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, "Gibran's pervasive influence on his colleagues in Arrabitah made them reassess their own work, and his Romanticism answered a latent need in them to liberate their own Romantic expression."\textsuperscript{20}

*The Prophet* which made Gibran a celebrity and a legendary figure across the world was published in 1923. *The Prophet* is a spiritual chronicle related to the journey of a man who is in exile and who is called Al Mustafa which means the Chosen One. It is a book which consists of 26 sublime poetic essays, illustrated with some of Gibran's sublime mystical drawings. Almustafa, the prophet, shares his timeless wisdom and insights on varied topics related to life. Three years after *The Prophet*, *Sands and Foam* was published in English. This book consists of captivating and inspiring aphorisms and parables which Gibran has presented in marvelously musical language. This book contains gems of wisdom expressed in very precise and perfect apothegms. In 1928, the longest book Gibran ever wrote was published entitled *Jesus, the Son of Man*. To write the story of Jesus was a great ambition which Gibran harbored from his youth. His aim was to portray Jesus as no one else has done before. For Gibran, Jesus was like any other human being acting in natural surroundings, living a life full of enthusiasm and love. For him Jesus was a man of passion who could love immensely and suffer immensely. Jesus had a fine humor, he had human weaknesses too, but he was the most sensitive human being who could empathize and lay down his life for humanity. *The Earth Gods* came in 1931. Gibran was 48 when he died in New York on April 10, 1931. The Arabic world sang praises of him and commemorated him as a genius and a patriot.

\textsuperscript{20} *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet*, p. 192.
Kahlil Gibran’s writings infuse our emotional and spiritual consciousness with new zest. He comes out as a poet-rebel and as a sensitive soul full of romantic ideals. Like a typical romantic writer, his writings have an autobiographical tone. He had a firm belief in the superior power of imagination. He exulted in the beauty and the variety of the natural word and craved for freedom from age old rigid norms and established rules. His early short stories, prose poems and later collections of aphorisms made him famous far and wide as he was celebrated as the greatest of Arabic Romantics. According to Suheil Bushri, “Few would contest Gibran’s status as the greatest of Arabic Romantics and father of a 20th-century Romantic tradition whose impact on Arab writers has been at least as strong as that of 19th-century figures such as Wordsworth and Keats on their English-speaking counterparts.”

Gibran introduced western romanticism and a freer style to the extremely pompous and ostentatious Arabic poetry. He brought freshness and novelty in the Arabic literary style. He helped Arabic poetry break away from the conventional norms of prosody. Najar says, “The word ‘tradition’ was anathema to him. He gave free reign to his unbridled imagination without attaching much importance to the constraints of the prosody or the stringent rules governing Arabic which he often came to ignore in his writing.” He developed a new poetic form called “prose poem”. Gibran’s poetics was a shift from the sterility of imitation to the poetics of originality in expression, style and meaning. Gibran’s works both in Arabic and English are full of lyrical outbursts and express his profoundly spiritual and mythological bent of mind. Almost all his works and in particular later works were influenced by legends and Biblical stories which were narrated from generations in the picturesque vicinity close to the primeval cedars of his homeland, Lebanon. He had a great knowledge of myths and

22 Kahlil Gibran: Author of the Prophet, p. 124.
legends in general but the legends, myths and folklore of his homeland had taken a
deep root in his psyche and can be found both in his literary works and paintings.

Gibran’s writings were influenced by varied elements. Boston’s literary world,
William Blake, Nietzsche and all that he read and observed helped him to be one of
the great creative masters with a prophetic tone, style and vision. He like English
Romantics was interested in imagination, nature, childhood, revolution, love, beauty,
liberty etc. Gibran was also influenced by American romantics like Emerson,
Whitman and Thoreau. His work bears the influence of their ideas of ‘self reliance’,
‘reincarnation’ and a presence of ‘greater self’ that each individual is able to grow
into. But among all the writers American as well as English, William Blake’s
romanticism, Mysticism, symbolism and prophetic vision had a great impact on his
mind and his influence can be seen in both his writings as well as drawings. Najjar
says, “Gibran identified with Blake’s expressionistic symbolism, his rejection of
slavish imitation of nature, his dream like fascination, the mythical content and almost
mystical quality of his art, and his vision of a last union to be regained.” Blake’s
work contributed in shaping Gibran’s thoughts. From an early age he started inquiring
about the religion of his birth and the role of the priests. He reckoned Jesus as a
leading figure of human kind. For Gibran true religion is not organized and orthodox
but liberating and personal. Gibran like Blake was a rebel as well as a reformer. He
abhorred conventions. He lived a life of a lonely poet believing resolutely in his
imagination. Paul Nassar writes, “Gibran was of the mold of William Blake: both
angry social reformer of old cultural contexts and the prophet of an expanding cosmic
consciousness beyond any need of a given cultural context. Most often and

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23 Ibid., p. 127.
fundamentally, however, he emerges as a lonely poet finding solace only in the poetic consciousness or imagination.\textsuperscript{24}

Gibran’s works venerate individual autonomy. He valued choice and free will. He abhorred and strongly condemned sectarianism and class oppression. His observations on brotherhood of men and man’s unity with nature and God appeal both to the youthful as well as to elderly readers. His Biblical style presents an invigorating, new way of looking at the world that has a worldwide appeal. Gibran worked to unite various religious sects as he believed that it will help eradicate the religious egotism, discrimination and violence which were widespread in his age. He advocated and preached lasting human, ethical, moral and sacred values which are essential to the creation of a world vision based on mutual understanding, brotherhood, love and unity of all. He raged against the evils that reigned in his beloved homeland as well as against all ills that contaminated human life and brought humanity to disgrace and decadence. Much of his writings deal with Christianity but he hated religious bigotry. He was a secular saint and appreciated all the religions of the world. Gibran wrote on spiritual and religious themes adopting a somewhat pagan theology. His spirituality is essentially pantheistic undermining cultural barriers. What he appreciates most in Christianity or in any other religion is spiritual love. Gibran loathed false civilization. He was preoccupied with the themes like equality between man and woman. He preached and all his life fought for justice, freedom and democracy. He had a firm belief in faith and reason. The themes related to ecology and environment find ample place in his writings. He craved for universal peace and unity of all religions. He fought for common people’s rights and persuaded them to awaken from the deep slumber. Andrew Sherfan writes, “His work reflects fully his rebellion against both

\textsuperscript{24}“Cultural Discontinuity in the Works of Kahlil Gibran”, p. 24.
civil and religious authorities. He considers himself a kind of a ‘prophet’, with a special mission to speak up for the masses and liberate them from the various evils that had befallen them as a result of their inertia, customs and traditions.”

Gibran was a man who loved beauty in all its manifestations. He shares the romantic trait of beauty worship with Keats as well as with Wordsworth. He writes in *The Prophet*, “… Beauty is life when life unveils her holy face.” He like Blake was a great advocate of liberty and raged in opposition to man made laws for they afflict severe injuries. Gibran was a man of immense imagination, a great dreamer and an exponent of love. In one of his prose poems “The Goddess of Fantasy” from *Thoughts and Meditations*, Gibran like Blake writes about the importance of dreams. He also highly praises the power of imagination because it is through the power of imagination that one reaches the realm of gods and sees the reality face to face. There is nothing base in the kingdom where thoughts dwell and imagination rules.

Truly I say to you that thoughts have a higher dwelling place than the visible world, and its skies are not coloured by sensuality. Imagination finds a road to the realm of gods, and there men can glimpse that which is to be after the Soul’s liberation from the world of substance.

He further writes:

He who passes not his days in the realm of dreams is the slave of the days.

Gibran’s poetic genius primarily lies in his use of figures of speech. He is a specialist at using metaphor. The simplicity of his language is unmatched in its sublimity and

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26 *The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran*, p.89
27 Ibid., p. 75.
28 Ibid., p. 75.
majesty. Gibran indeed creates beautiful images that are charged with emotions and that expand the reader's vision and his horizon of imagination. He dealt with varied subjects related to life and humanity like love, beauty, truth, justice, good and evil etc. Gibran's interest swung to mysticism and primitivism in his later writings but his writings turned again and again to the beauty and purity of nature. He romanticized nature and found in it an inspirational power for his poetry. He identifies the divine essence with the natural world. He was more of a pantheist as he saw God and nature as one phenomenon. He repeatedly points out to the contrast between natural world and the human world. In the former there is peace, harmony and innocence whereas in the latter there is chaos, injustice and sorrow. Gibran laments that modern man runs away from serene nature and takes refuge in concrete structures which are in so many ways like prisons. He writes in *Voice of the Master*:

> Nature reaches out to us with welcoming arms, and bids us enjoy her beauty; but we dread her silence and rush into the crowded cities, there to huddle like sheep fleeing from a ferocious Woolf.²⁹

Gibran often depicts himself as a solitary poet who is more receptive and sensitive than other people and who is proficient at revealing eternal truths. In the prose piece “The Lonely Poet” from *Between Night and Morn*, Gibran subscribes to the romantic view of the poet where a poet is an isolated and a solitary figure. The narrator, who is a poet, is lonely and stranger in this world. He says that people don’t seem to comprehend his language. But the poet has hope that his dreams are eternal and one day he will have the glimpse of that which he has never seen. The strain of mysticism also runs throughout this prose piece as the poet craves for the union with the ultimate

reality and thinks that he can attain peace. He calls this world a dark world and wants to escape into the world which belongs to his dreams and imaginings.

I am a stranger in this world, and there is a severe solitude and painful lonesomeness in my exile. I am alone, but in my aloneness I contemplate an unknown and enchanting country, and this meditation fills my dreams with specters of a great and distant land which my eyes have never seen.\textsuperscript{30}

He has a solid belief that the modern world corrupted by convention, oppression and hatred can be redeemed through love, goodwill and freedom. Kahlil Gibran was among the younger generation of Arab American writers who contributed immensely to the current Arabic literary renaissance and revitalization. Gibran along with other literary members of the Pen Bond did not endorse a sweeping linguistic restructuring of the Arabic literature. He could never think of profaning the holiness of formal Arabic. He rather campaigned for breaking out of conventional patterns in favour of an individual style. His early works in Arabic popularized the romantic tradition in Arabic arts and letters. He paved a way for the new kind of creativity. Gibran’s writings and especially his Arabic pieces were part of a shift from craftsmanship to inspiration, from imitation to expression. Irfan Shahid writes:

\begin{quote}
Although his creativity as a man of letters took place in America, he and his group of Arab- American writers revolutionized the course of Arabic literature in the Arab homeland as representatives of the new school of Romanticism in Arab literature antedating and preluding the rise and development of the romantic movement in the Arab world, through the Divan school and the Apollo school, both in Egypt. Thus, from their base in America, the Arab-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 150.
American writers presided over by Gibran, proved to be the catalyst in the literary renaissance of the Arab world in its vast Afro-Asian extent. Gibran sought beauty of thought as well as beauty of form. He created new metaphors and adopted a Blakean approach and method in treating imagination as the divine vision. He did not corroborate to the traditional norms of the past. Gibran like Blake preferred a free and spontaneous verse and blended classical Arabic with colloquial Arabic, hence gave birth to a new style. He embraced a simplified language that even unsophisticated audience could relate to. In the words of Joseph P. Ghougassian:

If today’s Arabic literature feels at ease with the rules of rhyme and rhythm, it is because Gibran, along with some other literary friends, broke away from the stagnant traditional prerequisites of the Arabic verse by proposing as early as 1920 a new poetic form called ‘prose poem’.

He followed the same rule and method in his English writings. They have the simplicity of Biblical psalms and remind us of Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience. Gibran’s work draws from two cultural traditions, English and Arab, but it is not bound by any biases, prejudices and restrictions favoring one culture over the other. In his work the two distant cultures and traditions find a perfect synthesis. His early work, though later translated into English, was originally written in Arabic. From Arabic language and literature he drew the majesty and grandeur of his language. And his exploration of English art and letters, above all his reading of the Romantic poets taught him to rely on personal experience and individual style. He came to saw individuality as the benchmark of poetic expression and spiritual

32 A Third Treasury of Kahlil Gibran, p. 189.
transformation. His simple style is graceful, reverberating, lyrical and able to communicate profound thoughts and feelings. His thoughts appeal to our hearts as well as our minds. Gibran believed in a romantic idea of eternal birth, reincarnation and continuity of life. He had a great faith in the transcendental power of romantic love and its ascendancy over custom and ritual. Gibran as a man as well as a literary artist devoted his life to contemplation, to peace, to love, to the life of the soul and the varied forms of beauty. Gibran loved nature, especially the natural beauty of his homeland and used it as a setting for all his literary works. He all his life in nostalgia went to his homeland while living in America. He constantly felt an irresistible pull for his native land. According to Najjar, “Throughout his life, out of nostalgia for his country and his childhood, Gibran would delve voluptuously back into his past.”

Gibran despised the Americans' greed for money, property and luxury. He yearned for the majestic mountains, the graceful cedars and for the air and the light of the Lebanon. Gibran is most Wordsworthian poet when it comes to the portrayal and depiction of nature. He raged against the degradation of pristine nature and the exploitation of natural resources and he knew that severe injuries were being inflicted on environment in the name of scientific progress. Gibran opposed Darwinian science and its materialistic stance, for Gibran always believed that matter and spirit are inseparable realities. Gibran saw in nature a divine presence and used it as an example to counter Darwinism.

Writing as he was when Darwinism was at its height, Gibran’s extraordinary receptiveness to the appeal of nature may in many ways be seen as offering a

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33 Kahlil Gibran: Author of the Prophet, p. 21.
positive counterpoise to the Darwinian metaphor. The most powerful imagery in his work is borrowed from nature, her rich and beautiful store of symbols providing him with the emotional and intellectual apparatus of his poetry and intensifying his most dream like moods with the ‘unfathomable mystery of Nature’s secrets’.\textsuperscript{34}

Like all the romantics he distrusted materialism and civilization for their ignorance of the importance which spirituality has for a human being. Gibran believed that it is in spirituality that the real essence of beings and non beings can be experienced and it is spirituality that gives meaning to the world of matter and substance. \textit{Between Night and Morn} starts with a prose piece called “The Tempest”, in which Gibran shows his romantic tendencies in their full bloom. The influence of Rousseau and Wordsworth is evident because the main character Yusif shares their distrust of civilization and wishes a spiritual awakening both for himself and for the people. The narrator is impressed by a solitary person living in a forest and gets a chance to talk to him. This solitary figure is none other than Yusif who has fled from the civilization and has taken refuge in a forest and is now living a life of meditation and contemplation. Yusif lives in a self imposed exile and Gibran seems to appreciate his personality, and thereby showing his own faith in a romantic tendency to escape from the harsh realities of mundane world into the lap of nature, where one can seek a perfect communion with the divine reality. This story also shows Gibran’s belief in global peace and through Yusif he strongly condemns the politics of bloodshed which is devouring the whole world. Yusif addresses the narrator and says:

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet}, p. 19.
If you place belief in your own words you should leave civilization and its corrupt laws and traditions, and live like the birds in a place empty of all things except the magnificent law of heaven and earth.\textsuperscript{35}

The prose piece, “The Enchanting Houri” from The Secrets of the Heart, reads like a typical romantic ode. This is a poem about a dream which Gibran wants to follow in order to free himself from the shackles of the mundane workaday world. Like Shelley in “Ode to the West Wind”, Gibran is reminded of his own past when he was as free as a bird enjoying the beauties of nature. He is reminded of the times when he was as swift and agile as the elements of nature. Gibran’s poem resembles Shelley’s ode both in terms of style and content. Shelley and Gibran both lament the loss of strength which they had in their youth and want to relive those carefree and blithe moments. The way Shelley came under the spell of the West Wind, in the same fashion Gibran feels more and more attracted to the enchanting houri. Gibran like Shelley wants to reach the utopia of his dreams where he can live a life of complete communion with imagination.

Oh Houri, listen to me! I was as free as the bird, probing the valleys and the forests, and flying in the spacious sky. At eventide I rested upon the Branches of the trees, meditating the Temples and palaces in the city of the colourful clouds which the sun builds in the morning and destroys before twilight.\textsuperscript{36}

Shelley wrote in his Ode to the West Wind:

\begin{quote}
If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran, p. 105.
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O Uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: timeless, and swift, and proud.  

As Gibran was a great idealist dreamer he wanted to revolutionize the world according to his own outlook and beliefs. According to Najjar, “The young man was ambitious and idealistic; he imagined he could change the world and tried to convert people to his ideas and theories on art, God and nature.” Gibran being a reformer wanted liberty for every human being. For him rebellion is essential in order to attain freedom and love as well as life can flourish only in the free atmosphere. In “Vision” from *Thoughts and Meditations*, Gibran says that life, love, and beauty are three

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38 *Kahlil Gibran: Author of the Prophet*, p. 71.
persons in one. He also says that life can not be without rebellion. He again says that freedom and life are integral. For Gibran love, freedom and life are one with God. Man can reach God through love, beauty, rebellion and freedom.

Life without love is like a tree without blossom and fruit. And love without Beauty is like flowers without scent and fruits without seeds. ... Life, Love and Beauty are three persons in one, who can not be separated or changed. \(^{39}\)

He further writes:

That which love begets,
That which rebellion creates,
That which freedom rears,
Are three manifestations of God.
And God is expression
Of intelligent universe. \(^{40}\)

Gibran emerges as a Romantic poet as he realizes the necessity of creating his own unique individual style in order not to be enslaved or confined by those who came before him. For him instinct was a higher faculty than reason. His reading of English romantic poets sharpened his already rebellious nature. He regarded natural impulse and passions as ideal creative force.

Gibran's Romanticism was a health-restoring revival of the instinctual life in contradistinction to the constraints that sought to sublimate human freedom in the united name of social tradition or religious conformity; in many ways his

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\(^{39}\) The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran, p. 60.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., pp. 60-61.
rebellion was akin to the beginnings of Romanticism in England a century earlier, when Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley strove to explore the literature of internalized quest and Promethean aspiration.\textsuperscript{41}

Gibran’s life was a romantic expedition. It was a progressive development from innocent childhood to disillusioned experience as he came to know the world and its corrupt practices. However, he finally achieved higher innocence and found solace in the world of knowledge and wisdom. Gibran’s belief in sorrow, suffering and pain as a means of purification and refinement grew up to be a dominant theme in his early writings. Romantic escape from the sordid reality of a mundane workaday world into the world of dreams became a favorite technique especially during the early phase of his artistic career. Gibran following Keats is seen calling upon sweet death in many of his poems and prose pieces. Whether Gibran speaks of nature as an independent entity of natural objects or their relation to each other, his firm belief that nature is a living being is always evident. Gibran laments with Wordsworth the brutality and inhumanity of ‘what man has made of Man’. Gibran rebelled against the decayed and rigid laws of church and society. He like Blake rejected reason in the name of imagination. Imagination for him was fundamental for he believed poetry is impossible without it. He had a prophetic vision and held an apocalyptic view of universe. He felt that the older order needed to be changed. Gibran’s Arabic heritage and legacy helped him to celebrate life and he would love to travel back to a time when people lived more fully and felt much more strongly. He celebrated the glorious past of the Arabic world but scathingly criticized what he considered its backward present. In the west he was impressed with the ideals of freedom and democracy, values which Americans cherished most, in addition to scientific progress, but he

\textsuperscript{41} Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet. p. 10.
rejected the excessive dependence of modern man on materialism and machine. In his later writings Gibran started to advocate the role of poets and artists in developing human consciousness and helping the human soul in its journey towards a higher order, a more divine realm. Deeply influenced by Greek mythology, Gibran expressed his concept of the artist and of Art. To him the artist and art are inseparable; they have a divine origin, and the poet's self is an intermediary between the gods and humanity. Gibran's inimitable poetic idiom characterized by beauty and spirituality became known as "Gibranism". It is characterized by a loose and flowing verse which is both rich and modern. Gibran's writings establish a mystical union with nature and a relationship of love and harmony. His writings stay beautiful and timeless. They are as insightful and relevant in our present time as when Gibran first composed them. There is no question that Gibran's work in Arabic was vital to the progress of twentieth-century Arabic literature and one can declare with confidence that Arab Romanticism begins with Gibran as he was the pivotal figure in the Mahjar movement of émigré Arab writers centered in New York. Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins quite aptly write:

In his 'outpost' of New York, Gibran initiated a Romantic movement and school in Arabic literature that echoed a generation's instinctive call for change and renewal. Living five thousand miles away from the stern and sanctimonious gaze of those whose vision could not transcend the inherited and inhibitive methods of their age, this first true rebel in Arabic literature enjoyed an unparalleled freedom that allowed him to revolutionize the literary sensibility of the time.\footnote{Ibid., p. 11.}
Even a common reader of Gibran can find that Gibran is generally romantic, meditative and spiritual. His works brought hope and happiness to millions as he emphasized necessity of religious tolerance, cross cultural understanding and human love. Gibran is a writer who irrevocably changed modern Arabic poetry, and who is probably the one modern Arab writer known throughout the world. He gave modern Arabic literature a new and creative impulse. He was full of energy and youthful vigor; he was daring and he brought to Arabic literature an entirely new and inventive vocabulary which challenged the formalized language of tradition. He is the only poet who truly represents Arabic Romanticism in all its forms and shades and is definitely a poet laureate of Oriental Romanticism.
Chapter-3

William Blake and Kahlil Gibran as Mystics
William Blake and Kahlil Gibran as Mystics

Mysticism is more or less a spiritual discipline which assists a human soul to make contact with the divine reality and a mystic is a person who has had a mystical experience on a very personal level. A mystic tries to make his vision comprehensible because he knows that it is only a chosen few who are granted divine consciousness and the perception to see beyond the material world. In the words of F. E. Spurgeon:

"The mystic is somewhat in the position of a man who, in a world of blind men, has suddenly been granted sight, and who gazing at the sunrise, and overwhelmed by the glory of it, tries, however falteringly to convey to his fellows what he sees."¹

Intuition, insight, instinct, visions, dreams, revelations and prophesies have a great role to play as a person goes through a mystic phase of his life. A mystic always seeks a communion with the ultimate reality. As he gains the conscious awareness of the presence of divinity, he identifies himself with the spiritual truth and finally with God. In the opinion of William Philip Downes, "The mystic believes it is possible to pass beyond the sphere of logical thought, that is, he believes it is possible not only to infer that God is, but, that it is possible to feel, to touch, to become actually one with God."² Mystics have a firm belief that there is a deep reality which lies beyond the physical and mundane day to day world of affairs. The physical reality in their view is a superficial phenomenon and one has to delve deep in order to reach the spiritual treasures that can lead a mortal to the fundamental truth. Mystical experience is generally understood as the communion of a spiritually awakened human being with God on an individual level rather than on a collective level. A mystic perceives an

¹ Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature (The Project Gutenberg E Book : Release Date: April 7, 20) P. 4.
ultimate unity, a definitive oneness in all things present as well as absent; but one cannot make sense of this unity and oneness using his or her physical senses and reason. A mystic sees this unity as the very heart of the creation and it becomes his life experience. F. E. Suppergeon very aptly states: "The true mystic then, in the full sense of the term, is one who knows there is unity under diversity at the centre of all existence, and he knows it by the most perfect of all tests for the person concerned, because he has felt it. True mysticism – and this can not be over-emphasized – is an experience and a life." After going through the mystical experience, a mystic always feels the sensation that some higher and greater truth or power has laid a hand on him. The mystical experiences which are a part of mystic’s life are marked by varied feelings and insights. A mystic feels a sense of timelessness as he sees a vision of infinity and eternity. He feels the sense of blessedness as he sees himself in the presence of eternal truth. He has a sense of unity and totality as he observes the things around him and feels that there is a common thread which goes through all the entities of the universe. Since mystical experience does not come within the ambit of rationality a mystic cannot describe the merits and meaning of his experiences sufficiently.

All the mystics do not follow the same path. In fact there are many ways to reach the ultimate reality. Some mystics look outward and with the help of their physical senses observe external world of nature. They with the help of their mystic fervor and commitment go beyond the surface reality of physical world and find divinity at the root of everything. Some mystics on the other hand look inward into their own selves and find the ultimate truth at the bottom of their self and personality. Though mystics have to work very hard at a spiritual level in order to discover the divinity in their

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5 Mysticism in English Literature, p. 6.
own personality, still majority of them choose their own self as a field of exploration while they strive to reach the one whose essence pervades and permeates everything external as well as internal. The purpose and aim of almost every mystical path is to experience divine consciousness, enlightenment and oneness with the 'One' who contains all. But whichever the path a mystic chooses, it is always the soul which has a say over the 'matter'. Reason and logic are discarded in favor of spiritual consciousness because the immediate as well as the final goal of a mystic lies in the realm of spirituality rather than in the world of substance. Supergeon says, "... the mystic believes that as the intellect is given us to apprehend material things, so the spirit is given us to apprehend spiritual things, and that to disregard the spirit in spiritual matters, and to trust reason is as foolish as if a carpenter, about to begin a piece of work, were deliberately to reject his keenest and sharpest tools." A mystic can undergo all his experiences within the framework of a particular religion but quite often mystics have gone beyond mainstream faith. The mystics generally seek out inner or esoteric meanings within conventional religious doctrines. In fact mystics are less concerned with religious differences as they care more about social and individual growth. There have been mystics for whom all religions are sacred and they believe that the essence of all religions is universal as all religions lead to the same goal. They care more about the growth of inner personality. Mysticism is dualistic if it maintains a distinction between the self and the divine and it is nondualistic when it maintains that there is an essential and close affinity between the self and the divine.

Christian mysticism, as it talks about the relationship between God and the soul has so many diverse views about this relationship, but the purification of self and the

\(^{4}\) Ibid., p. 3.
reunion with God is its ultimate goal. It believes that God and Man have got separated because of the fall of Man and man in this world has to strive hard to achieve his divine status again which will become possible once he reunites with God. Christian mysticism believes that the spark of divinity lies in man itself and he needs development form within. He needs to care for his fellowmen in order to reach the divinity. In the words of Northrop Frye: “The higher state of heaven is achieved by those who have developed the God within them instead of the devil. Those who have fed the hungry and clothed the naked are here, because they have realized the divine dignity of man.”

Islamic mysticism is generally known as Sufism. Sufism is the spiritual Path of Islam. Sufism has been described in different way by scholars writing in English but they all consider it as an interior, esoteric aspect of Islam. The western scholars call it Islamic mysticism because it has some similarities with Christian mysticism and also with some other schools of mysticism. Its main aim is cleansing of the spirit and turning ones heart away from all else but God. It helps its adherents to know how to reach the Divine, how to purify the inner self and get rid of all that is dross. What differentiates Sufism from Christian mysticism is that Sufism is a continuous historical and even institutionalized movement in the Muslim world and it has millions of adherents even at present time. In fact in the vast Muslim world there is hardly any area that does not have a Sufi order or a Sufi tradition still at work and flourishing.

Kaballah is a kind of mysticism based on Judaism and it seeks out deeper interpretation of Torah and other Mystical works. The interpreters go beyond the surface meanings of these sacred scriptures.

In the Quaker view of Mysticism soul is an inner light which they see as a presence of God in a human body.

Gnosticism sees creation as a struggle between the opposite forces of the Evil and the Good, the forces of the light and the forces of the Dark. Gnostics see a sharp division between material realm and a spiritual realm. The material realm in their view is under the influence of dark and evil forces because of its division from a higher realm of spirituality.

The mystic experiences, whatever the nature of mysticism, are very difficult to explain and describe but mystics throughout the history of mankind have used different media in order to give a glimpse of a higher world to the common masses. Poetry and art have been a channel for mystical thought in western and eastern world alike. Poetry has been the main medium and has been used by so many mystics when they wish to describe the consciousness they have attained due to the result of their mystical experiences. It can be no accident that much of the mystical writing is in the form of poetry, and it springs from an inner concordance of art and religion. Most of classical Upanishads are in verse, and so are the Bhagvad Gita and countless later Hindu mystical works. The large part of holy Bible is in the form of poetry. The great Sufi mystics were often great poets, such as Rumi, Ḥallaj, Hafiz, Kabir, Basho and even Omar Khayyam. Not only Blake and Wordsworth but English metaphysical poets have been called mystical. American Emerson and Walt Whitman are very famous for their mystic thoughts. “Mystic poets” is the most widespread term and is
used to describe poets who have experienced heightened state of awareness. Mystic poetry has a very distinct place in the field of literature because it deals with the deeper truths, inner realities, the matters of spirit and all that which is beyond physical and material. Mystic poets give form to the formless. The different shades of mysticism can be found and seen here and there in the poetry of diverse poets belonging to almost all the ages of human history. The strands of mysticism can be seen in almost all the romantic poets of the world irrespective of the language they write in or the age they live in. In some romantic poets the mystic elements remain dormant as they care more about other phenomena which is of immediate concern to them. In English Romantic literature the shades of mysticism can be found in poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. But William Blake by all critical standards can be taken as a mystic proper as well as a supreme creator who was always conscious about the art of poetry as it was a medium with the help of which he gave the glimpse of higher truths to the world. Blake’s life and work are a manifestation of the reality of a strong connection between intense perception achieved through a state of expanded consciousness, and the gift of imagination. Throughout his life Blake examined this relationship and seems to have lived for the purpose of translating this awareness into words. Blake seemed to have believed that there was little difference between his own action and God’s will. Blake was confident in declaring himself the instrument of the divine. His perception of his creativity as spirituality inspired has prompted many to consider whether or not he had hallucinations or mental problems. Some even considered him mad. One can possibly include Blake in the tradition of hallowed poets because his work is essentially part of the western biblical pedigree. It is written in the tradition of Milton. William Blake was a mystic and has similarities with the classical mystics like Plato, Jesus, Rumi, Bohme, Swedenborg and the others
like them but it has been always difficult to classify him. There are elements of Protestant mysticism, Kabbalism, Gnosticism and many other mystic orders in Blake but he was sharp enough to make all these part of himself. F. E. Supergeon says:

...he possessed in addition a philosophy, a system, and a profound scheme of the universe revealed to him in vision. But within what category could Blake be imprisoned? He outsoars them all and includes them all. We can only say that the dominant impression he leaves with us that is of his vivid, intimate consciousness of the Divine presence and his attitude of devotion.⁶

In his own view most of his writings were done under the guidance of spiritual powers. It appears that he pursued creativity not only for its own sake, but in order to follow a particular spiritual calling. Whatever he created, throughout his long span of life, was for the purpose of revealing higher truths. Blake was a passionate artist and poet, and yet his motivation was more related to his gnosis and spiritual motivation than to his expectations of success. To say that Blake was detached from his creative work, and not particularly interested in writing verse would be incorrect. Blake was resolute to persist with his beloved arts but he was quite relaxed about whether or not he achieved any recognition from his work. Blake’s priority was not literature alone but literature for a certain purpose. Blake’s spiritual life was far more important to him than his creative life, despite the fact that he constantly married the two elements and suggested that they had the same source. Blake’s larger poetic outlook, with its radical vigor and innate power was a product of the poet’s stern resolve to live a spiritual and at the same time an imaginative life. Like a true mystic Blake with the help of his art and writings took on the divine job of helping others peep within

⁶ Mysticism in English Literature, p. 41.
themselves and uncover what they have hidden from themselves in order to discover their higher true self. Blake believed in the eternal existence of all things. Max Plowman writes, “He believed that all things existed in Eternity – not that they were born in Time with a faint hope of extending Time to an everlasting futurity. All things had eternal existence, and their manifestation in time was a subjective sensory impression.” Exploring his artistic works and writings, we are able to cleanse the doors of our perception and see the essential unity with the eternal. In fact, Blake was a visionary mystic. He saw visions from his very childhood and reproduced them in various forms through his creation. He used to have visions and the essence of Blake’s mystic experiences cannot be examined in isolation from his reported visions. Blake’s visions certainly influenced and inspired his art and poetry throughout his life, but the poet appears to have experienced an inner revelation, which not only resulted in an immediate restoration of his confidence, but indirectly led to the creation of some of his profound work. Blake’s concern for the subject of perception moves beyond a concern for vision and the five senses towards a concept of what one might call extra-sensory perception. He was plagued and enthused by his own vivid visions of a broader reality and many people even today discuss them as hallucinations. He believed that the inner world of these visions was of a higher order than that of a physical reality and that ideals should be taken from that world of inner vision rather than from the world of matter. But for Blake commonplace things had their own value as they acted as signs referring to the higher truths. According to Maurice Bowra, “Blake was a visionary who believed that ordinary things are unsubstantial in themselves and yet rich as symbolic of greater realities.” Blake’s visions have a sacred quality which has characterized the religious thought of

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mankind in all ages. But Blake abhorred orthodox religion and believed in the religion of imagination. He believed that God and imagination are one and God is the creative and spiritual force in man, and distinct from man God has no meaning. Maurice Bowra states, “For Blake, God and imagination are one; that is God is the creative and spiritual power in Man, and apart from man the idea of God has no meaning. When Blake speaks of the divine, it is with reference to this power and not to any external or independent godhead.”9 Blake, because of the divine quality of his vision would call himself a prophet and a solider of Christ. Blake, as we know, had a great faith in spirituality and believed that he himself was a highly spiritual being. He believed that the material world is shadowy and ephemeral. It was Jesus who symbolized for Blake the vital relationship between divinity and humanity. The universal soul of Man whose chief representative was Christ was the only reality for Blake. As Max Plowman writes, “Fortunately there is no doubt about what reality meant to Blake. It was for him the universal soul of Man. That was for him the only reality: all else was a product, or “emanation” of that soul. He conceived of reality as eternal form, contrasted with unreality which was temporal appearance.”10

One of Blake’s main thoughts was that of duality of creation. In his view our life and this world works with the help of contraries and each is indispensable for subsistence. Blake sought man as the end of his search. According to Blake all of us reside in each other. He is of the view that after the fall Man lost his unity with God and in this world Man is craving for that lost unity all the time. Blake’s mysticism is deep rooted in the practical side of his nature and touches the problems of his life. Whatever he experienced, he experienced directly. Blake claimed that the spirit of his

9 ibid., p. 34.
10 An Introduction to the Study of William Blake, p. 56.
dead brother used to come to him in visions and prompted his writings as well as his illustrations.

I know our deceased friends are more really with us than when they were apparent to our mortal part. Thirteen years ago I lost a brother and with his spirit I converse daily and hourly in the Spirit and See him in my remembrance in the regions of my imagination.¹¹

He would all his life communicate with the great poets of past ages with the help of his perfect visions. As a poet he would call himself a mere secretary and believed that the real authors were in eternity and dictated to him. It is important to mention that Blake’s mysticism had a stamp of Swedenborg and Boheme on it. In the worlds of Mona Wilson:

Swedenborg’s account of his own visions, his belief in the spiritual symbolism of the material world and interpretation of the Bible in accordance with this belief, and his doctrine that Christ is the only God, had a lasting effect upon Blake’s thought.¹²

She further writes:

From Boehme Blake derived his belief that the creation of the material world was an act of mercy, because by its means complete destruction was intercepted and redemption became possible, that union with the Eternal can

be attained only by annihilation of the Selfhood, and that Man is himself infinite.¹³

Blake, a poet mystic, had a great influence on some major writers who came after him. W. B Yeats is a great example. The Lebanese American Kahlil Gibran would call him a ‘God Man” and wrote almost everything under his impact and influence. In the words of Alexendre Najjar: “He was sensitive to the abundant symbolism of the works [ of Blake ] marked by spiritual dialectic between Good and Evil, between heaven and Hell, between Regeneration and Disintegration and the attempt ‘to open the immortal human eye inward.”¹⁴ Gibran in the same way as Blake was a poet mystic and a visionary prophet. According to Joseph P. Ghougassian, “It is worthwhile to recall that the vision Gibran holds of the world. Man and God resemble very much Blake’s apocalyptic vision. Blake outlined the Correspondence between the material and the spiritual; Gibran likewise describes the unity of existence, as a coming together of polarities.”¹⁵ Blake’s and Gibran’s intense opposition to organized religion, together with their passionate focus on inner spiritual life, are their first common characteristics. They both experienced a spiritual dissatisfaction in the world corrupted by material greed and hunger. They constantly focused on spirituality and moved towards mysticism. Their spirituality was independent from religious dogma and it is the priority they gave to spiritual life which governs their creativity. Blake and Gibran sought spiritual meaning beyond accepted traditions and as a result, moved towards mystical paths. As mystics however they defy categorization and move beyond the borders of religion and culture. Blake and Gibran had a great interest in the themes of waking, seeing, observing and perceiving and in the belief

¹³ Ibid., pp. 56-57.
that the uppermost stage of fourfold perception is beyond common sense perception. In both Blake and Gibran it is the experience of higher consciousness which leads to the creation of sound and beauty.

Though Gibran is not a mystic proper, there are moments when he seems to be a mystic of a higher order who appears to be under the guidance of Jesus, Socrates and Gautama Buddha. After reading Gibran one can feel that he never fears to spread his wings in the vast and open firmament in order to reach the boundless, infinite and limitless spiritual world. Gibran’s mysticism is not far removed from spiritualism. He is more of a prophet and a visionary. According to Najjar, “This inspired man was different from all the others; he was made of the stuff of prophets.”

One can read a spiritual philosophy in most of his works. Gibran considered himself a soul serving heavenly messengers. He felt duly bound to show to the people the essence hidden behind the material and the visible. Najjar states:

According to Gibran, Man does not know how to strip himself down to his bare essence. He has to outdo himself, to forge ahead with an ardent desire (the shawq of the Sufis) towards his divine self, and to aspire to universal unity where everything reintegrates in a unique and total hymn: the unity which is none other than God. Similarly, the Self, after having travelled the path leading to God, would merge with him.

The struggle between body and soul was a major concern to Gibran but after reading Blake the tension got resolved. He came to believe with Blake that ‘Man has no body distinct from soul.’ Gibran’s purpose was to make all the people of the world realize

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16 Kahlil Gibran: Author of the Prophet, p. 60.
17 Ibid., p. 151.
the divine and quite in line with Blake he believed in the supreme abilities and capacities of Man. He believed that we need to remove the thick dust of physical world from our eyes in order to have a glimpse of our true self and once we see our self, we see absolute reality. Like Blake Gibran also had a firm belief in the power of imagination. In his view imagination is the faculty shared by both God and man and it is only possible with the help of imagination to reach eternal truth or God who himself is a supreme originator and creator. Gibran had a faith in man as a divine being. He believed that man naturally grows to divine perfection because God lives permanently in everything visible or invisible. He had faith like Blake that every living thing is holy and sacred. Though Gibran believed in a transcendental God, he also believed that nature or the physical universe is the key to the reality of both God and Self. It was through visible things that both Blake and Gibran reached the invisible. They reached the transcendental state which they called eternity and being in this state helped them to create new and living worlds through their writings and art. Both the writers strongly emphasized that the spirit is immortal and that there is no conflict between body and soul. They believed that there is a complete harmony between body and soul. They believed that a person who sees the infinite in everything becomes like God and every sincere and honest person is essentially a prophet. Throughout their lives they grew in their understanding of the human soul and wished all the people would do the same. They thought that it was their responsibility to help people see within themselves so that they could get a vision of eternity in a split second. Blake and Gibran appear to have been under the direct inspiration of some divine force and their poetry is full of light and glory which transports one to supernatural regions and places which the senses cannot perceive. We realize that life is something more than what we see with the help of our senses.
Under the divine guidance they transmitted all their prophetic knowledge to the people around them through the excellent medium of poetry and art. Both these writers believed that poetry is an inspiration or gift which comes directly from the transcendental realm of the Universe. They knew that art gives new shape and light to objects and makes them new and bright. They used this gift to pass on their dreams and visions to the generations which came after them. They had a power to visualize their spiritual worlds which seemed to others as abnormal. They both felt strangers in this world because both believed that they were in constant communication with visions. In fact Blake’s life, more than Gibran’s, was a never-ending vision. The greatest challenge to both these poet mystics was in sharing their unique prophetic revelations and their apocalyptic view of the universe with the average mortals. The essential unity which they saw between God and his whole creation was meant to be communicated to people. And it is not an exaggeration that they succeeded in conveying the complex truths in a lucid but symbolic language which people claimed as their own. What intrigues the readers of Blake and Gibran the most is their criticism of orthodox morality. They were not against religion but against the false use of the institution of religion by vested interests. They both believed in the religion which entertains the idea of God and Man being same in their essence. Harold Bloom writes about Blake:

Blake thought himself a Christian, but was not a theist in any orthodox sense. If the divine is the human released from every limitation that impedes desire, then Blake is a believer in the divine reality. Yet this is not the divine if any
orthodox theology in the west, for Blake wishes to take away from our vision of divinity everything that would make God a ‘wholly other’...\textsuperscript{18}

Barbara Young writes about Gibran:

Like all great mystics Gibran was intensely religious. And it was because he was intensely religious that he rebelled against all bounds and limitations which would estrange the soul from its legitimate and free share of participation of the divine.\textsuperscript{19}

Born into a predominantly Christian culture Blake was preoccupied with evaluating the moral structures and traditions of his country. His spiritual discontent is especially evident in the poems contained within the Pickering Manuscript. Blake’s search for spiritual truth and his efforts to grasp it are reflected in “The Crystal Cabinet”. The poet writes:

\begin{quote}
I strove to seize the inmost form
With ardor fierce and hands of flame,
But burst the Crystal Cabinet,
And like a weeping Babe became—

A weeping Babe upon the wild,
And weeping Woman pale reclin’d,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} Barbara Young, This Man from Lebanon: A Study of Kahlil Gibran (New York: Knopf, 1945) 40.
And in the outward air again,
I fill'd with woes the passing wind²⁰

The poet strives to seize the essence of deepest form of life, and also strives to communicate it with ‘hands of flame’ – usually representing Blake’s burning, creative forge. This poem and other poems of Pickering Manuscript are born out of Blake’s passionate preoccupation with inner spiritual life.

William Blake in the *Songs of Innocence* has many poems full of mysticism. “The Lamb” presents a vision where Blake sees Christ, God and Lamb as one. Seeing a little lamb a child starts asking questions related to the creation of little lamb. He answers himself that the power which made it is as innocent as a lamb itself. He is called by its name. The child then relates its innocence and meekness with that of the lamb and then with Christ. The question of a child is a simple one, and yet it is a timeless question asked in all ages by all human beings about their origins and the nature of creation. The conventional figure of Jesus as a lamb emphasizes the Christian morals like compassion, modesty, and peace. This poem has a mystical aura and a sacred tone.

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

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Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee.

He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.21

"The Divine Image" gives us a mystical insight into the nature of the relationship between Man and God. Blake believes that God and human beings are one form. He says that mercy, Pity, Peace and Love and all the other virtues have a divine form as well as a human form. When we pray to God, we are actually addressing a human form as it shares the divinity with God. God dwells with these virtues when they are found in a human being. Blake through this poem conveys the message of love, brotherhood and fellow feeling. In his opinion it is humanity which is of essential importance and one needs to go beyond the boundaries of religion, nation, race and colour to grasp this truth.

... 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.

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And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk, or Jew.

21 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell,

There God is dwelling too. 22

In “On Another’s Sorrow” the poet shows his complete belief in divine compassion. He believes that God is always present to protect human beings from the terrors which afflict human beings. God lives in and around us. Jesus, who for Blake is the incarnation of God, becomes one with God’s creation in order to help them hold successfully onto life. This poem touches the greatest spiritual heights while dealing with the love which God has for his creation.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,

And thy Maker is not by:

Think not thou canst weep a tear,

And thy Maker is not near. 23

“The Little Boy Lost” is a symbolic poem where Father stands for God and the little boy represents a human being. The little boy has no clue where his father is going and he gets lost in the darkness. This has happened because the boy didn’t obey his father. Blake’s message is that the gap between man and God is widening because of man’s lust for power and his greed for material world. God can not live near such a man who sullies his body and soul by material greed and selfishness.

Father, father, where are you going?

Oh do not walk so fast!

Speak, father, speak to you little boy,

Or else I shall be lost.”

22 Ibid., p. 30.
23 Ibid., p. 37.
The night was dark, no father was there,
The child was wet with dew;
The mire was deep, and the child did weep,
And away the vapour flew.\textsuperscript{24}

In "The Little Boy Found" God takes pity and protects the child who symbolizes a human being shorn of spirituality. God is all compassion for the lost boy. He guides him to his mother so that he understands that power of love and affection is greater than the power of material. The mother symbolizes divine power.

The little boy lost in the lonely fen,
Led by the wandering light,
Began to cry, but God, ever nigh,
Appeared like his father, in white.

He kissed the child, and by the hand led,
And to his mother brought,
Who in sorrow pale, through the lonely dale,
The little boy weeping sought.\textsuperscript{25}

The \textit{Songs of Experience} too has may poems imbued with mystical thoughts and mystical passion. In "The Fly" Blake stresses the insignificance of a human being in the face of the supreme power. The ultimate power can any time wipe a human being out of its existence. For God the life of a fly is as good as that of a human being. For

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp. 26-27.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 27.
him the whole of creation is same. The poem is written in a mystical mood and man is seen as a mere speck on the face of the earth in contrast to the supreme reality which permeates the whole universe.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?
For I dance
And drink, and sing,
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.²⁶

In “Infant Sorrow” Blake gives vent to his mystical vision. This poem conveys the yearnings for the lost spiritual world. Blake believes that man is divine in nature. Coming to the earth man for a time being leaves his true abode which is the realm of spirituality. Caught in the trap of the material world, man is filled with a longing to meet the divine reality. Human life is a struggle between the pressures of the material world and the yearning for the spiritual world. Man struggles throughout his life balanced between matter and spirit.

My mother groaned, my father wept,
Into the dangerous world I leapt;
Helpless, naked, piping loud,
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 48.
Struggling in my father's hands,
Striving against my swaddling bands,
Bound and weary, I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.²⁷

_The Marriage of Heaven and Hell_, contains Blake's mysticism which approves of a God who is embodiment of both good and evil forces. This prose poem reads like a biblical book of prophecy. Blake in this poem presents a unified vision of cosmos in which both bodily desires and the yearnings of soul are part of a divine order and hence the marriage of Heaven and Hell. Blake believes that body and soul are not distinct.

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.²⁸

In Blake's opinion God is not an external reality but lives within Man. Man's senses can perceive the infinite in everything because infinite lies within him. Man needs to purify his perception in order to see the infinite.

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For Man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.²⁹

In the first book of his prophetic work _Milton_ Blake as is the case with Calvinism points out that humanity has three disvisions (i) Elect, (ii) Reprobate (iii) and the

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²⁷ Ibid., pp.54-55.
²⁸ Ibid., p. 87.
²⁹ Ibid., p. 93.
Redeemed. Reversing Calvinistic values Blake voices his view that the 'Reprobate' are true believers, while the 'Elect' are egoist moralists. At this point Milton returns to earth in order to set right the errors he has committed as a puritan. He wants to purge himself and go to eternal death. In the second book of *Milton* Blake presents a vision of a final union of living and dead; internal and external reality, male and female and shows the transformation of all human perception. The mystical elements in Milton are subtle but evident. Blake wants to open the world of transcendental visionary experience and hopes that other people's minds will be radically transformed as is the case with his own person.

Blake in *Milton* says:

> Whatever can be created can be annihilated: Forms can not:  
> The oak is cut down by the Axe, the Lamb Falls by the knife,  
> But their Forms Eternal exist forever.\(^{30}\)

He further states:

> To bathe in the waters of life, to wash off the Not Human,  
> I come in Self-annihilation and the grandeur of Inspiration.\(^{31}\)

One can read Kahlil Gibran's writings in line with Blake's poetry. His *Tears and Laughter* is full of such instances. Gibran in the prose piece "The Creation" gives his readers many mystical insights. He believes that God has created humans in his own image.

> The God separated a spirit from Himself and fashioned it into beauty.\(^{32}\)

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\(^{30}\) *Blake Complete Writings*, p. 522.  
\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 533.
Man consists of both good and evil elements. God and the devil live simultaneously in a human personality. However, God has kept man under his loving guidance and protection lest he be led astray by evil forces.

In the poem “Have Mercy On Me, My Soul!” Gibran deliberates on the metaphysics of duality related to body and soul. He laments that all his life he celebrated his soul and neglected his body. This seems to be the cause of his suffering according to him. Gibran opposes the doctrine according to which the soul is considered superior to the body. He stresses that body and soul are concomitant realities. For him the relationship between body and soul should not be like that of Master and Slave. One should try to respect and reach the demands of both soul as well as body. In other words both body and soul should be given their rightful importance.

You are hastening toward Eternity,
But this Body goes slowly toward
Perishment. You do not wait for him,
And he can not go quickly.
This, my soul, is sadness.\(^3^3\)

“Songs of Wave” is a poem written in an Eastern mystical tradition. The beloved craves for her lover. She at times desires a union with him. Here, the symbol of ‘wave’ has been used for the eternal lover and the image of ‘shore’ for the beloved.

The strong shore is my beloved
And I am his sweetheart.
We are at last united by love, and
Then the moon draws me from him.
I go to him in haste and depart
Reluctantly, with many
Little farewells.\(^{34}\)

There is no rest for true lovers. This love can be found between God or gods and a devotee or between two human beings.

“Song of the Man” is a poem where man sings of his history. He is in this world from the beginning, yet he is imperfect. According to him the only perfection is in the complete union with the divine.”

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I was here from the moment of the} \\
\text{Beginning, and here I am still. And} \\
\text{I shall remain here until the end} \\
\text{Of the world, for there is no} \\
\text{Ending to my grief-stricken being}.^{35}
\end{align*}
\]

In “A Poet’s voice” Gibran says that love for material things deadens a man and spiritual strivings keep him alive. The poet is a mystic and believes that humanity is the spirit of a great being. The poet sees himself one with all humanity.

“I came here to be for all and with all, and what I do today in my solitude will be echoed by tomorrow to the people. What I say now with one heart will be said tomorrow by many hearts.”\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 17.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 57.
For the poet all are a unity and all religions are one because we are part of greater soul. The poet hates authority of every sort because only God can do absolute justice. He believes that life emerges from the soul and not from the body.

“We and You” is a prose poem which reads like a romantic ode. In this poem Gibran contrasts the ‘Sons of Sorrow’ with the ‘Sons of Joy’. For him the sons of sorrow are the people who live a fruitful life. They are poets, prophets, and sensitive humans. Sons of Joy are the tyrants, despots and false leaders. For Gibran sorrow is the spirit of God in the heart of man. Here again Gibran polarizes the world into the spiritual and material realm. People who are more inclined towards spiritual pursuits are really alive and the people who are led by materialistic interests are the living dead. They live a life devoid of meaning and purpose.

“Ashes of Ages and Eternal Fire” is a story where the two true lovers meet again after many centuries. Nathan’s beloved dies and he is heart broken and filled with grief and sorrow. Decades and centuries later, Ali Hussaini who was actually Nathan in the preceding age is filled with love for a maiden and he remembers that they have met somewhere before and lived together in the past. Gibran believed in the doctrine of rebirth and transmigration of souls. Gibran also believes that it is love alone which leads to a complete union with the supreme reality. Gibran’s mysticism is rooted in the ideal of love seeking a union with divine reality.

*Thoughts and Meditations* is also full of mystical insights. In “My Soul Preached to Me” Gibran talks about the power of love which pervades all the objects of nature. Here Gibran has a mystic realization that all spaces, all places and all men are actually one reality. Gibran Writes:

\[^{36}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 86.}\]
But now love has become a halo whose beginning is its end, and whose end is its beginning. It surrounds every being and extends slowly to embrace all that shall be.\textsuperscript{37}

He further states:

Now I realize that whatever I am contains all places and the distance that I walked embraces all distances.\textsuperscript{38}

In “Communion of Spirits” the lover calls his beloved to come and meet him. He laments that world is filled with people full of selfishness and material interests. The world is filled with cruel people making life miserable. The only refuge is love where man can attain spiritual bliss and peace.

Men are bent under the burden of gold, and the steep road of green weakens their knees.\textsuperscript{39}

In “Among the Ruins” Gibran says that love and eternity are one and the same thing. Nothing remains except love. The material things decay and are destroyed with time.

I created a temple in Jerusalem and the priests sanctified it, but time has destroyed it. But in my heart the altar I built for love was consecrated by God and sustained against the powers of destruction.\textsuperscript{40}

He further writes:

Eternity keeps naught but love, for love is like Eternity.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{37} The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 23.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 64.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 86.
“Perfection” is a prose poem in which Gibran expresses his mystic fervor. According to him man approaches perfection when he truly realizes that he is boundless, infinite and everlasting and also realizes that he is a human being with all his shortcomings and frailties. All this helps him to become a shadow of God’s shadow.

Man approaches perfection when he feels that he is an infinite space and a sea without a shore, an everlasting fire, an unquenchable light, a calm wind or a raging tempest, a thundering sky or a rainy heaven, a singing brook or a wailing rivulet, a tree abloom in spring, or a naked sapling in Autumn, a rising mountain or a descending valley, a fertile plain or a desert.42

Sand and Foam is a book of spiritual sayings where Gibran at the very outset shows his interest in spirituality and his firm belief in Man’s immortality.

I am forever walking upon these shores, betwixt the sand and the Foam. The high tide will erase my foot-print, and the wind will blow away the foam. But the sea and the shore will remain for ever.43

He believes that Man Shares in God’s divinity and like God is eternal. The absolute is within man. Man is an infinite sea. He writes:

Should you really open your eyes and see, you would behold your image in all images. And should you open your ears and listen, you would hear your own voice in all voices.44

He further states:

41 Ibid., p. 87.
42 Ibid., p. 118.
43 Ibid., p. 1.
44 Ibid., p. 17.
I am the flame and I am the dry bush and one part of me consumes the other part.45

In “The Forerunner” Gibran says that we are the only reality because God lives in us. All human beings are one with each other.

In “Out of My Deeper Heart” Gibran says that with the help of deeper knowledge and firm faith, a human being can soar in the limitless skies. But it is materialism which limits man’s flight.

_The Prophet_, Gibran’s most popular work, presents him as a writer of prophetic vision who shares his spiritual sensitivities with his readers. _The Prophet_ is undoubtedly one of the greatest mystic books of the world. Kahlil Gibran had no purpose in writing _The Prophet_ other than to gratify the spiritual hunger of world plagued by the evils and the dark forces of materialism, commercialism and commodity fetishism. The people were in dire need to come out of the void which the loss of spirituality had cast them into. They had no hope but to yield once again to the dictates of inner consciousness on their way to redemption as the disease nourished by the world of substance was growing more and more menacing. They were waiting for a ray of hope, for a prophetic message which would carry them on its wings from the inferno of iron and gold to the paradise of peace and salvation. Even the religion which was once considered the fountainhead and the mainspring of spirituality had lost its redemptive force, because of its orthodoxy, dogmatic nature and institutionalization. _The Prophet_ came at the right time in the history of mankind and quite successfully acted as a balm in healing the scars which the loss of God consciousness had inflicted on the mind and heart of humanity. Gibran’s prophecy

proved true in that the people who now read The Prophet consider it a spiritual and a mystic treatise holding a mirror to the veiled mysteries of the complex phenomenon called Life. They read their own lives and the lives of their fellow beings in the light of the book and try to overcome their spiritual shallowness by heeding to the timeless and universal truths which adorn its pages. This book presents Gibran as a writer of prophetic vision and spiritual insight who made his spiritual gifts available to the people, his contemporaries as well as future generations. As an astute Sufi and a man of grand vision, Almustafa (the prophet and the protagonist of the book and the mouthpiece of Gibran) teaches moral values, makes known the mysteries of life and shares his timeless knowledge about the human condition. He describes the longing of the soul for regeneration and self-fulfillment. He teaches that the man’s purpose on this planet is a mystic quest towards a ‘Greater Self’, towards ‘God hood’ and ‘the Infinite’. Gibran had a firm faith in the infinity of life. He believed that man needs to explore his inner being in order to meet his true self which is boundless and limitless. Man’s way to the union with God lies in his own heart but for that he needs to awaken spiritually. Gibran strongly believed in the power of the human soul. The book is a spiritual journey and an odyssey into the inner consciousness of human life and it particularly dwells on the common people’s thirst for life. Almustaffa with the help of his spiritual philosophy and intuitive wisdom goads readers towards our ultimate aim that is to search for the true significance of life. Reading the book one realizes that life apart from being a physical reality is a dwelling place for spirit and has innumerable treasures to offer but only to those who dare to delve deep and explore. Almustaffa in his words and deeds teaches truth, wisdom and knowledge with such prophetic authority and mystic fervor that one gets carried away at first, but after contemplating the words is rewarded with such a balance and equipoise that the life changes for ever
and at the same time one become conscious of the inner spiritual potential which is
innate with every human being. He believes that truth opens the world of wisdom and
wisdom teaches unwavering devotion and love for life and its varied gifts. The central
mystic principle Gibran adheres to in *The Prophet* is that God is latent within every
life form. He is a ‘Greater Self’ dwelling in every individual soul. Gibran sees a world
as a perfect unity and life as a timeless harmony. Seemingly *The Prophet* speaks
about the common ties binding people together, but he sees them in the light of the
spirit rather than as mere material associations. The mysticism of this book appeals to
our shared concepts and shared practices and reveals an intense preoccupation with
the visionary and the spiritual. Its striking feature is its spiritual-moral approach. The
mystical teachings contain so much that is analogous the teachings of the Christ. The
readers who explore deep into the book get an insight into the higher meaning and
purpose of human existence. We are encouraged to yield gladly to the embracing
wings of love for our own spiritual growth and we are made competent to gauge the
secrets of our own hearts. The book is infused with a mystic’s vision of the Divine
and it is animated by the spirit and the vision. What makes Gibran’s *The Prophet* so
singular is its sublimity and grandeur which gives it a fundamental elating force. It
derives its beauty out of a thought provoking spiritual range of life. This book is a
longing for the unity of being. It brings harmony and peace for everyone seeking
solace and wisdom in a world that has gone spiritually bankrupt. It speaks directly to
the core of the human soul. In fact it presents human soul as essentially dignified and
good.

Almustafa, the Chosen, who is the protagonist of the book, gives voice to the
mystical tendencies of Gibran and seeks for the true union with God. He teaches
moral values and talks about the mysteries of life. Almustafa strongly believes in the
power of human soul and spirituality. He uses the metaphor of ‘greater sea’ for the ultimate reality and says that every individual is a drop craving to merge with the sea. Speaking about Love, he says that love makes a person a real human being and makes him divine and one with the creator.

When you love you should not say, ‘God is in my heart,’ but rather, ‘I am in the heart of God.’

He talks about ‘children’ and like a mystic says that children are sent by God and parents do nothing but protect them. They can not give them their thoughts and they know nothing of their souls.

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, and though they are with you they belong not to you.

Speaking about the ‘House’, he says that Man’s house should be the whole natural world because his soul occupies every place in the Universe. Man like god is boundless because god lives in Man, in the form of his soul.

And though of magnificence and splendor, your house shall not hold your secret nor shelter your longing. For that which is boundless in you abides in the mansion of the sky, whose door is the morning mist, and whose windows are the songs and the silence of the night.

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46 Ibid., p. 12.
47 Ibid., p. 20.
48 Ibid., pp. 40-41.
Talking about ‘Crime’ and ‘Punishment’, Gibran defines man as consisting of two selves; One, a ‘god-self’ and another ‘man’. So the evil which is ‘man’ is in every human being because good can not exist without evil. ‘Pain’ he says is essential as it helps a human being to develop fully both in body as well as in soul. Self knowledge, according to him is impossible because self or soul is a boundless sea. The soul has a depth measureless and limitless and it walks all the paths. According to the Prophet when man comes to this earth, he already knows everything because God has bestowed on him every gift and the teacher helps him to find the truth which already lies in his mind and soul.

No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.49

Almustafa like a true mystic believes that meditation, contemplation and silence are better than talking. He believes that life is timeless because God is timeless. He says that prayers are a means to attain a perfect communion with God. Talking about pleasure, Almustafa gives a lot of importance to body and its demands. Like Blake and Donne, he emphasizes that body like soul, is an important element to be satisfied. The soul works through the body and is not independent of it. Talking of religion he says that religion is what we do with our life. God lives in us, so the religion lives in us. Our daily life is our temple and we need to find our true religion in our day to day life. For him the death and the life are one reality. He believes that our life starts after death.

For life and death are one, even as the river and sea are one.50

49 Ibid., p. 67.
50 Ibid., p. 93.
He tells the people that we are all one reality. Towards the end of the book Almustafa assures the people that he will come back again. Here Gibran through his prophet voices his belief in the doctrine of ‘rebirth’ and ‘transmigration of souls.’

Forget not that I shall come back to you. A little while, and my longing shall gather dust and foam for another body. A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me.\(^5\)

Reading *The Prophet*, it seems that it is inspired by Biblical Literature, Christian and Sufism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Romanticism and Transcendentalism. Through this book Gibran communicates a universal humanistic message and truths relevant to all cultures and times.

Each and every work of Gibran can be read and interpreted in the light of Blake’s mystic thought. Both these writes were selfless and their aim was to serve the higher powers through their works. The prophetic message of Blake and Gibran continues to inspire millions of readers who love to recite or listen to their poetry. Let me conclude this chapter with what Mona Wilson writes about Blake. This holds true about Gibran as well. She writes, “Blake had traversed the fourth stage of the way, the most terrible to him as to all mystics, and had entered on the last, the Unitive life.”\(^5\)

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 113.
\(^5\) *The Life of William Blake*, p.207
Chapter-4

William Blake and Kahlil Gibran as Social Rebels
William Blake and Kahlil Gibran as Social Rebels

Though William Blake and Kahlil Gibran were born at different places, in different times and in a particular social milieu quite different from each other’s, the affinity between these two writers is surprising and at the same time illuminating and enlightening. Both these writers despite being mystics were in Sarter’s term “engaged” (committed). They were intensely aware of the social and political structure of their society and could identify the wrongs which were besetting the society. They were extreme social critics. They were rebels at odds with the social setup which encouraged corruption, hypocrisy and materialism. Both Blake and Gibran strongly opposed slavery and racial prejudice. Both the writers convey truths which are universal in their scope. Their message transcends cultural barriers. They never favored a particular race, color, class, nation and religion. History is witness that writers like Blake and Gibran, in all ages have striven hard to awaken the dead conscience of the masses. Blake and Gibran taught people the lessons of rebellion by singing the sweet melody of love. Both Blake and Gibran rose in rebellion against the rigid laws of church and society. They rejected reason and gave high praise to imagination. They read and interpreted Bible in a way that was not acceptable to a common Christian. Kahlil Gibran like his predecessor, Blake, felt that the foundations of the old order were crumbling down and it needed to be replaced by a new order. The old order had grown stale and the people in power were taking recourse to outdated customs, rituals and traditions in order to suck the blood of common people. Blake’s and Gibran’s interpretation of the holy book, their rebellion against church and its corruption and hypocrisy, their concern for the underdogs and the repressed, their sociopolitical as well as spiritual visions were similar in so many ways. Gibran
after reading Blake at a very young age was deeply influenced by his views, ideas and ideals. Gibran saw in Blake a kindred spirit whose opinions and thoughts on socio-political matters were similar to his own views and beliefs in more than one way. He identified himself with the great master as he read and analyzed his poetry and paintings. Alexandre Najjar writing about Blake’s impact on Gibran says:

Although too young to be able to interpret Blake’s thoughts in their entirety, he assimilated some of his critiques of society and the state, including the rebellion against the prince and the priest, the creative virtue of desire, and the supremacy of imagination linked to an internal God. He also understood, at least in part, the notion of the union of being and the power of Christ, whom he considered a rebel.¹

William Blake was a social rebel with very radical beliefs. He rebelled against prevailing Victorian morals as they put an unnecessary constraint on God-given natural impulses and desires. He believed in following the natural instincts rather than adhering to the artificial standards set by society. He wanted to see society free from corruption and hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, he thought, was the greatest sin and he detested it the more. His vision which he expresses in his writings though seemingly religious is subversive and rebellious. He used the language of religious scriptures in order to censure the elements responsible for the rot which is eating the vitals of the society. He abhorred moral laws because he believed that repression kills the essential self of Man and all the unrealized potential of people goes waste if not realized fully. Blake rejected all laws in the name of liberty. He believed in freedom because it provides space to think and act. A slave has no personal opinion and he has no choice to think

or act by himself. Blake taught men to perceive world quite differently as he challenged the fundamental premises on which the foundations of the world stood. In the words of John Beer, “Blake was one of those men who; by standing at an angle to his age, causes us to look at it, as a whole, with new eyes. Its artistic, social and religious presuppositions are both challenged and thrown into relief.”² Blake hated oppressors and tyrants but at the same time hated passive people who do not revolt or rebel against the cruel forces. In his view people are also responsible for their own downfall because no authority could dare to suppress them if they raise their voice and protest against the wrongs done to them. Blake detested slavery and believed in sexual equality. He held that men and women are equal and hence should be treated the same. Blake fiercely opposed the marriage laws of his day. He disapproved of conventional Christian belief of chastity as a virtue. He was a one man revolution against all the powers that stood for conservatism, orthodoxy, religious dogma and convention. According to J. Bronowski, “He was trying to make men give up systems, rationalist and religious alike.”³

Kahlil Gibran’s criticism of society and the state, his rebellion and opposition against the authority of both the king and the priest are in line with Blake’s thought. In a fashion similar to Blake, Gibran revolted against society and its hypocritical standards. He stood against tyrannical powers but at the same time showed his indignation towards the individuals who placed themselves as obedient tools in the hands of tyrants. He hated passive people who do not dare to rise in rebellion against corrupt and cruel forces. Gibran like Blake was pained to see that the influential and dominant people thrived by exploiting the weak members of the society. He was

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deeply hurt when he saw common masses wallowing in the mire of ignorance. He was intensely aggrieved when he saw the poor suffering extreme pangs of hunger and dying of fatal diseases unattended. Gibran’s great aim was to restructure the society for the betterment of general humanity. His voice of reform was loud and harsh at times, because he knew that the ears of the tyrants had grown deaf. The tyrants had grown careless and insensitive to the humiliation and exploitation they were inflicting on God’s creation. All the same, his call for reform had a world wide appeal. Paul Nassar draws a parallel between Blake and Gibran thus, “Gibran was of the mold of William Blake: both angry reformer of old cultural contexts and the Prophet of an expanding consciousness beyond any need of a given cultural context.” Gibran as a social rebel rejects the complacent, submissive ways of the majority in society. Throughout his writings one can find negative portrayals of clergymen and the encouragement of women’s liberation. He believed that priests have made religion a business enterprise. They use it to amass wealth and enlarge their estate. Gibran’s rebellious attitude towards societal rules and regulations relate him to Blake. Gibran exposes man’s perversion of religious and natural rights. He believes that in the name of religion people are exercising hypocrisies that work in society under the pretext of tradition and justice. Gibran like Blake abhorred slavery and gave a call for self-liberation. He believed like Blake that men and women have equal status and should be treated at par with each other. He was deeply concerned about the condition of women and protested against the injustices meted out to them and the injuries inflicted upon them. Najjar writes, “Having a deep sense for understanding human concerns, he denounced injustice and oppression and relentlessly defended the rights

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of women in the east." He further states, "He was primarily a reformer preoccupied with the human condition, which he wanted to liberate from all forms of slavery, and he relentlessly advocated his ideal of freedom." Gibran like Blake was aware that it is freedom alone which guaranties a happier and prosperous society. Freedom gives men confidence to perform and make use of their best capacities and talents.

The religious beliefs of both Blake and Gibran were at odds with the common people as well as with the religious authorities. Blake believed that orthodox religion was a mere hypocrisy and was a source of all cruelty. He was of the view that institutionalized religions preached virtues but seldom practiced what was sermonized. He protested against the age old decayed norms of society. Blake in "The Everlasting Gospel" does not present Jesus as a religious preacher or a traditional prophetic figure who delivered lectures on religion but as a supremely creative being, above dogma, logic and even morality. Blake in this poem presents Jesus as a social rebel and a revolutionary and symbolically urges people to raise their voice against social evils and ills. Blake says that Jesus was not gentle or meek the way priests make us believe. He was a man of authority, resolution, courage and passion. He was a man of action. He could never bow his head to oppressors. He never gave up. He stood firmly against all sorts of oppression and detested meanness. Jesus spent all his life opposing the false ideals of bogus rulers. He hit hard at tyrants and dictators. He was very humble to men but very severe on dishonest rulers.

Was Jesus gentle, or did He
Give any marks of gentility?

5 Kahlil Gibran: Author of the Prophet, p. 177.
6 Ibid., p. 111.
When twelve years old He ran away,
And left His parents in dismay.\(^7\)

He further writes:

God wants not man to humble himself:
That is the trick of the Ancient Elf.
This is the race that Jesus Ran;
Humble to God, haughty to man,
Cursing the Rulers before the people
Even to the Temple’s highest steeple;\(^8\)

Kahlil Gibran quite like Blake was a staunch critic of dogmatic religion and orthodox morality. Going against the societal norms he goaded people to rebel against the corrupt priests and cruel religious authorities. He believed that religion in the hands of priests has become an institution of corruption as it bases itself on manmade laws. Clergymen deliberately misinterpret religious scriptures and use them for their personal good. In the opinion of Joseph P. Ghossassin: “… Gibran is harsh on established religion because he sees a similarity between society as an institution built on fabricated laws and the church, another social institution resting on man-made laws promulgated by a self-appointed hierarchy of clergymen.”\(^9\) Echoing Blake, Gibran in one of his prose pieces called “The Crucified” lambasts all those people who in the name of Christianity exercise hypocrisy, deceit and falsehood. They go to church but at the same time live the life of ignorance and extreme darkness. People have made their religion a mere ritual rather than a practice partaking life. They don’t practice the essentials of religion in their day to day lives. According to Gibran

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modern man is shorn of the humanity whose gospel Jesus had taught and spread among people. The priests are making mansions in the form of churches rather than helping the poor and the needy. Gibran's view of Jesus is quite similar to that of Blake. He believes that Jesus' kingdom is of heart and soul. Jesus came to change people's way of living. He came to transform individual's psyche with the intention that man learns the lessons of true humanity. A passage in "The Crucified" from *Secrets of Heart* reads as:

> He [Jesus] came to demolish the majestic palaces, constructed upon the graves of the weak, and crush the idols, erected upon the bodies of the poor. Jesus was not sent here to teach the people to build magnificent churches and temples amid the cold wretched huts and dismal hovels. ... He came to make the humans heart a temple, and the soul an alter, and the mind a priest.¹⁰

Blake's quite vehemently resented orthodox Christianity because he felt that it encouraged the restraint of natural desires and discouraged pleasure. He was a severe critic of religious authorities who saw religion as moral precepts rather than forgiving of sins. He believed that the quality to forgive is one of the greatest virtues and it is greatly respected and loved by gods. For him real morality comes from within. It is an unnatural practice if forced on people. Gibran following Blake opposed church for amassing wealth, exploiting common people and putting restraint on the normal desires of men. According to Najjar, "Gibran was ulcerated by the coercive authoritarianism of some ecclesiastics and their wealth at a time of shortage. He was inspired by Blake, who believed that priests 'tie up joy and desire in a bramble'."¹¹

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¹¹ *Kahlil Gibran: Author of the Prophet*, p. 149.
Blake and Gibran were acutely conscious of political developments which were taking place in their times. They both had a natural affinity with revolutionary forces. They were born revolutionaries. Rebellion was in their blood. Blake was a political radical influenced by his contemporaries like Thomas Paine, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. He supported the American rebels in their struggle to liberate themselves from the British control. He supported French Middle class in their fight to unshackle themselves from the repressive clutches of aristocracy. Blake also supported the resistance of working class against economic and social inequalities in England in the wake of Industrial Revolution. He was a staunch critic of capitalists and a great friend of working class. He disliked industrialists for they violated the rights of laborers. He was an ardent supporter of French Revolution and the ideals it espoused. In fact some of Blake’s best works were inspired by political upheavals like The French Revolution. William Blake wrote a poem by the name of French Revolution in 1791. He wanted to compose it in seven books but only one book could reach the public. In this poem, Blake discusses the evils inherent in the French monarchy and wishes that the Bastille be destroyed for the cause of freedom. Blake in this poem describes the events surrounding the French Revolution. Blake emphasizes the ills of the feudal system and the corruption and decay of the totalitarian regime and church. Blake was never a part of any radical political party in England at the time of the French Revolution, but his works contain radical revolutionary thoughts. This poem is a witness of his participation in the debate over the worth of the French Revolution. Blake as we know was an early supporter of the American Revolution and he had a firm belief that it would bring about liberty to the entire humanity. According to Blake the French were trapped in a tricky feudal system that was represented by the Bastille, a prison in which the enemies of state were confined. In
In the opinion of Blake it was American Revolution which motivated the French revolution. In this poem the ideas expressed are in direct contrast to those men who wrote and preached against the French Revolution. Blake in this poem combines myth with history and he is able to create an apocalyptic vision which sounds the trumpet of revolution.

The noise of trampling, the wind of trumpets, smote the palace walls with a blast. Pale and cold sat the king in midst of his peers, and his noble heart sank, and his pulses suspended their motion;¹²

Following Blake, Gibran strove consistently in his writings to wake up the people of Orient. He urged his countrymen to free themselves from the Ottoman tyranny and from other oppressive forces. Gibran was quite actively engaged in the political developments which were taking place in Syria. In the words of Irfan Shahid, Blake and Gibran had a highly developed political consciousness and their contribution to political revolutions of their times was not confined only to their literary works and paintings but also in their being active political activists. Shahid writes:

Both [Blake and Gibran] were rebels. Blake like all English Romantic poets and men of letters was a supporter of the ideals of French Revolution. ... So was Gibran a rebel against the social and ecclesiastical feudalism that was rampant in the Lebanon of his time. He wrote trenchantly against it and also against the hold of Ottoman Sultans over not only Lebanon, but also the

¹² *Blake Complete Writings*, p. 147.
Arabs. The rebelliousness of both did not remain academic and both were political activists.\textsuperscript{13}

Gibran wrote for his society in the belief that people will shed their passivity and actively participate in revolutionizing the social setup for their own good and well being. According to Joseph P. Ghogassin, "In general, one of the direct implications Gibran was trying to achieve with his social writings was to awake his countrymen from slumber to rebellion. I am not too wrong in suggesting that he was looking for a blood-shedding revolution."\textsuperscript{14}

Blake was one of the earliest champions of feminism and Gibran also stood for the rights of women and believed in equality between the sexes. In Blake's as well as Gibran's age women were treated as slaves and had no identity of their own. They were forced to obey the male dictates. Blake and Gibran rose in rebellion against their societies as both of them opposed forced marriage which subjects women to extreme torture and humiliation. They despised the patriarchal structure which had reduced a woman to non entity. William Blake in his "Visions of Daughters of Albion" and Gibran in Broken Wings shocked their readers by the bold stand which they took in relation to the place and status of women in the society. In "Visions of Daughters of Albion", Blake registers his protest against the false morality of his society. Though this poem narrates a story having mythical figures as it characters, yet it reads like any other tale related to our own day to day world. Blake's mythical figures represent common men and women. Oothoon, a very sensitive and emotional female character, is in love with Theotormon. Theotormon stands for the chaste man who is filled with

\textsuperscript{13} Dr. Irfan Shahid, "Kahlil Gibran Between Two Millennia."

a false sense of morality and virtue. Oothoon craves for Theotormon’s love and Theotormon loves her too. Unfortunately she is violently raped by Bromion, a violent and ferocious rapist. Bromion symbolizes any man who takes pride in defiling the honour of female sex. After Oothoon is raped, both Bromion and Theotormon consider her impure. They run away from her because they are both chained by the expectations of society and its worn out laws. It seems that Theotormon holds Oothoon responsible for the sexual act instead of blaming Bromion. He also falsely believes that sex is illicit. Bromion, on the other hand, is enslaved by his own violent act. Blake in this poem comes out as a vehement social rebel. The theme of this poem is suppression of women. It talks about the rape of innocence. The theme is partly a criticism of sexual morality of Blake’s times. It also offers Blake’s view of the evils of organized religion as well as comments on slavery.

At entrance Theotormon sits, wearing the threshold hard
With secret tears; beneath him sound like waves on a deserted shore
The voice of slaves beneath the sun, and children bought with money,
That shiver in religious caves beneath the burning fires
Of lust, that belch incessant from the summits of the earth.\textsuperscript{15}

It is about sexual jealousy and double standards. Blake voices his feminist concerns and laments that women are used as bonded slaves by men. She has no command over her own sexuality. She has no right over her own body. Blake abhors the tradition of marriage, because it is through this institution that church forces a woman to marry against her wishes. How can any sane woman be expected to live in the same house,

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Blake Complete Writings}, p. 190.
under the same roof with somebody she dislikes. Her whole life becomes hell. She carries the pain all her life and dies dissatisfied.

Till she who burns with youth, and knows no fixed lot, is bound
In spells of law to one she loathes? And must she drag the chain
Of life in weary lust? Must chilling, murderous thoughts obscure
The clear heaven of her eternal spring;...\textsuperscript{16}

The poet shows a severe disdain for the hypocritical modesty and selfishness of males in dealing with female folk. At the same time Blake, as always, denounces the conservative morality which suppresses Man's normal instincts of sex. He believes that love should be given its due freedom, so that it grows and flourishes. Blake exposes abuses perpetuated by a patriarchal moral code and ends with a high promise that life is holy. In a patriarchal setup a woman is thought of as an outcast and 'the other'. A woman who is defiled and raped by a man is left by her own near ones in a lurch. A woman is punished for a sin she never committed and a man is exonerated of all his transgressions. A woman is left craving for the attention of her beloved, who corrupted by unnatural morality declines to accept her.

Silent I hover all the night, and all day could be silent
If Theotormon once would turn his loved eyes upon me.
How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure?\textsuperscript{17}

The person she trusts the most, refuses to accept her because she is no longer thought as pure.

\textsuperscript{16}ibid., p. 193.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 191.
Kahlil Gibran through his novella, *The Broken Wings*, registers a strong protest against age old stale and rotten societal norms. This novella is a tale of love doomed by restrictions and restraints in a cruel society where love is laid waste by greed, corruption, false conventions and patriarchy. It expresses the plight of Oriental woman and criticizes the greed and corruption inherent in the clergy. It talks about wealth as an impediment to true happiness. Selma, the heroine of the novella, has to sacrifice her true love for rotten social customs as she is under tremendous social pressure. The story is autobiographical in nature. Here the narrator, who is actually Gibran himself, talks about his first love, Selma. The narrator visits the house of Selma and seeing in her a heavenly beauty falls in love with her. Selma seeing in him a noble soul starts worshipping him. The narrator soon comes to know that Selma being the daughter of a wealthy but an innocent man will certainly be exploited by the rich clergy. Selma as well as her father knows that Bishop will try to contrive the marriage of his greedy nephew with her, for no other purpose than for wealth and property. Narrator sees a heavenly spirit in Selma but finds her silent when the arrangements of her marrying with the nephew of bishop are being made. Her being silent shows that a woman of the Orient knows about her tragic fate and destiny because of the context she is living in. The fate of Selma is decided by her father, and under the cruel gaze of Bishop, she is married to Bishop’s nephew.

Thus destiny seized Selma and led her like a humiliated slave in the procession of miserable Oriental women, and thus fell the noble spirit into the trap after having flown freely on the white wings of love in a sky full of moonlight scented with the odor of flowers.¹⁸

Her father could not dare to protest because the society was not there to support him. The Oriental woman has no choice. The narrator feels distraught after his beloved has got married to a cruel man. But Selma encourages him to face the facts bravely. Soon after the marriage her father dies and the two lovers resume meeting each other. When Bishop comes to know about Selma’s going out of the house once in a month, he gets suspicious. She is confined to her room. The narrator wants his beloved to rebel but she refuses because she is afraid that the cruel forces within the society will not let them live in peace. Selma dies after giving birth to a dead child.

Gibran in this novella scathingly criticizes Christian Bishop, Moslem Imam and Brahmin Priest for sucking the blood of common people. They amass wealth and riches and also see to it that all their kith and kin are prosperous and wealthy. They resort to all the unfair means in order to achieve their goals and live by cheating and robbing.

The heads of religion in the East are not satisfied with their munificence, but they must strive to make all members of their families superior and oppressors. The glory of prince goes to his eldest son by inheritance, but the exaltation of a religious head is contagious among his brothers and nephews. Thus the Christian bishop and the Moslem Imam and the Brahman priest become like sea reptiles who clutch their prey with many tentacles and suck their blood with numerous mouths.¹⁹

People have no right to raise their voice against the cruel treatment meted out to them. Gibran says that the eastern woman goes as a slave to her husband’s house. She has to do all the household chores and she can never claim to own anything in her new

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 380.
home. Quite often she has to live in awe and fear of her in-laws; her husband has absolute power over her and she has no right on her own person. About Selma, Gibran writes:

Unaware, she symbolized the Oriental woman who never leaves her parents’ home until she puts upon her neck the heavy yoke of her husband, who never leaves her loving mother’s arms until she must live as a slave, enduring the harshness of her husband’s mother.\(^20\)

Gibran says that women in the modern materialist world (which is predominantly patriarchal) are deemed as nothing but a commodity to be bought and sold. Within the greedy community of money lovers, a woman is valued till she is capable of providing necessary service to her husband and his people. Once her beauty fades and her strength dwindles she is left to die without being attended.

The woman is looked upon as a commodity, purchased and delivered from one house to another. In time her beauty fades and she becomes like an old piece of furniture left in a dark corner.\(^21\)

Gibran in his novella, with all his emphasis, favours love outside marriage, because when marriage is not based on love and mutual respect it is doomed to fail. Marriage as an institution can succeed only when husband and wife love and respect each other. Love cannot be bought or given birth to with a few chants sung at marriage ceremonies. If a man and a woman are married and they don’t share the bond of love with each other, it is better to dissolve the relationship before it becomes a real hell and destroys them. In fact Gibran believed that if two people are in love with each

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 385.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 398.
other, marriage ceremony is a mere formality, because in truth they are united before any man made law or institution would grant so. Gibran champions the cause of women and lays stress on the values of human freedom and dignity. Gibran’s social rebellion, his fierce criticism of Orthodox Church, corrupt priests, forced marriage and his advocacy of love outside marriage bears the stamp of Blake’s ideas on the same issues.

William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* though written in prose has a poetic force and bursts with revolutionary energy. This prose poem is revolutionary at different levels and presents Blake as a severe social rebel up in arms against the traditional age old religions and traditions which believe in separation of soul from body and render body as evil. Blake believes that body and soul are one unity and demands of both body and soul need to be satisfied for an overall balanced personality. Blake believes that instincts should be given their necessary freedom because if suppressed they lead to imbalance and destruction. Blake topples orthodox morality upside down. Blake in the part of the poem called “Proverbs of Hell” goes against the popular beliefs of society and comes up with the conception of hell not as a place of punishment and retribution but as a source of genuine energy and vigor. Hell is depicted as opposed to the static and regulated perception of heaven. For him hell is the symbol of passion, energy and revolutionary fervor. In a way Blake celebrates the energies of Devil, who for him symbolizes artistic inspiration and creativity. Blake reveals to his readers the repressive nature of conventional morality and institutionalized religion. He launches a satiric attack on orthodoxy in general and utters a revolutionary prophecy. In “A Song of Liberty” which ends this prose poem, Blake revels in revolution and prophesies a new era of political freedom. It is an exhortation to the different peoples’ of the world to break the shackles of religious
and political oppression. Throughout this work, Blake presents a series of contraries – Heaven and Hell, Good and Evil, Reason and Energy etc. – but then topsy-turvy’s them, reversing their conventional values. He is seen celebrating energy, Evil, Hell and even Satan. Blake believed that contraries are essential for the growth of human nature but conservative morality and orthodox religion has polarized Man’s dual qualities, using one side of their own nature to repress the other. Conservative theology has given soul greater importance over body. In fact it denounces body as the originator of sins. Blake also attacks law enforcing agencies for restraining and infringing upon the rights and freedom of people. Blake castigates the religious authorities, because by forcing people to suppress their normal sexual instincts, they give birth to brothels. Excessive repression is the cause of prostitution. Blake Says, “Prisons are built with stones of law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.” He fiercely attacks the priests for laying a curse on the sweetest of joys. The sweetest joys of humankind lie in the fulfillment of their instinctual desires.

As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys.

Blake deflates the notion that organized religion is in any way natural. He deems it as a part of custom and a mere superstition. Priests have made it seem natural and are taking advantage of it. It helps them to exploit people because people easily yield to the discourse called religion. Blake believes that virtue lies in our impulses. Rules, regulations and commandments deaden our natural senses. He believes that Jesus acted through impulse and not through reason.

22 *Blake Complete Writings*, p. 151.
23 Ibid., p. 152.
I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these Ten Commandments. 

Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules. 24

The concluding ‘chorus’ ushers in the dawn of freedom where there is no curse on joy and love. Life is holy and needs to be lived with all the fervor and energy.

Let the priests of the Raven of dawn, no longer in deadly black, with hoarse note curse the sons of Joy. Nor his accepted brethren – when, tyrant, he calls free – lay the bound or build the roof. Nor pale religious letchery call that virginity that wishes but acts not! For every thing that lives is holy. 25

One can trace the themes related to rebellion which are found in The Marriage of heaven and Hell in the writings of Kahlil Gibran. “John the Madman” from Secrets of Heart, is a story where Gibran exposes corrupt church. He exposes the greedy and cruel priests who for the sake of material gains oppress the poor. They don’t give them freedom to read the scriptures and interpret it on their own. John is not mad as the title suggests. The church calls him mad because he raised his voice against the corrupt monks and dared to read the scriptures in their true light. His mother has to pay her precious possessions in order to free her son from the clutches of cruel clergy. Gibran scathingly criticizes the priests for they believe in amassing wealth at the expense of the poor. They are tyrants who force the poor into submission. Whatever they do they do it for their own personal interests. They live a life of revelry at the expense of the poor. They are false in their words and deeds.

Oh Jesus, they have built these churches for the sake of their own glory, and embellished them with silk and melted gold. ... They left the bodies of Thy

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24 Ibid., p. 158.
25 Ibid., p. 160.
chosen poor wrapped in tattered raiment in the cold night. ... They filled the
sky with smoke of burning candles and incense and left the bodies of Thy
faithful worshippers empty of bread. ... They raised their voice with hymns of
praise, but deafened themselves to the cry and moan of the widows and
orphans.\textsuperscript{26}

Gibran’s “Cry of the Graves” from \textit{Spirits Rebellious}, is a story where the narrator
lambasts the man made laws enforced by the rich on the poor.

\textbf{What is law? Who saw it coming with the sun from the depths of heaven?}\textsuperscript{27}

Punishing the criminal they meet evil with evil. These laws have no stamp of God.
The ignorant law punishes the woman when she searches for her true love outside
marriage and the law never touches the sinful father. The ignorant law punishes the
laborer when he tries to snatch his share from the priests after their refusal to grant
him any food. The ignorant law punishes the man who tries to save the honor of a
woman.

In \textit{America, a Prophecy} Blake says that the spirit of rebellion once aroused can
not be suppressed by the tyrant powers. Blake celebrates the spirit of rebellion and
believes that it is only after revolt that people attain freedom, dignity and peace. Blake
rages against orthodox religion, man made laws and exults in following the instincts
rather than suppressing them. Blake believes that the oppressed will finally vanquish
the oppressor, provided they show patience and resolution. They need to see beyond
the prison walls. The world belongs to them because they are the producers. They

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran}, p. 204.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 277.
produce and create with their sweat and blood. Capitalists, oppressors and tyrants are parasites.

Let the Slave grinding at the mill run out into the field,
Let him look up into the heavens and laugh in the bright air;
Let the inchained soul, shut up in darkness and in sighing,
Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years,
Rise and look out; his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open;
And let his wife and children return from the oppressor’s scourge.²⁸

Blake is of the view that revolt is a natural struggle for freedom against tyranny and for the regeneration of the social order. The liberation of Orc (god of revolution) from the oppressive religion of Urizen (god of reason) is an allegory of America’s struggle against England in particular and of all social revolutions in general. The predominant theme of this poem is liberty and the overthrowing of long established repressive systems, both religious and political. The man made laws and corrupt theology are the greatest hurdles in the way of liberty. To follow religion blindly is to fall in the trap wherefrom it is very difficult to escape. The only way out is to rebel and revolt against the oppressive forces which corrupt the whole social order in the name of religion.

That stony law I stamp to dust, and scatter religion abroad
To the four winds as a torn book and none shall gather the leaves;²⁹

In the same way as Blake, in his prose poem “My Countrymen’ from Secrets of the Heart, Gibran expresses his dismay over the sloth his countrymen are in. He wants his

²⁸ Blake Complete Writings, p. 198.
²⁹ Ibid., p. 198.
countrymen to strive for the glory and dignity which the divinity has bestowed on his creation. He is pained to see that his countrymen believe in superstitions and live in the fears of the powerful and the cruel. His countrymen are used by clerics for their selfish ends. They believe in magic and follow magicians. They live in the constant dread and cannot stand against despots. They live in the mire of ignorance and hence are unaware about the filthiness of the environs they are living in. He derides their hypocrisy and falsehood. This prose poem shows Gibran’s love hate relationship with the country of his descent. He laments that his people have no courage to face their enemy. They are living a life of weakness and ignorance. They have grown in years but are immature in their minds. For Gibran his countrymen are as good as dead, for, they have lost the concept of living a dignified and meaningful life.

Your souls are freezing in the
Clutches, of the priests and
Sorcerers, and your bodies
Tremble between the paws of the
Despots and the shedders of
Blood, and your country quakes
Under the marching feet of the
Conquering enemy; what may you
Expect even though you stand
Proudly before the face of the
Sun? ... ³⁰

³⁰ The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran, p.188
One of the very important revolutionary poems of Blake is "Tiriel". The message of this poem is that slavery can not be done away with unless there is rebellion. Rebellion is a must in every age to keep tyrants from incessantly harming and exploiting the weak and meek. In every era people challenge the old stale customs and rituals. History has witnessed so many revolutions in which the weak have overthrown the strong. Though tyrants use all the means possible to crush the spirit of rebellion, they can not escape their fate. Tyrant’s fall is a part of natural cycle because their rise being at the expense of the poor masses, their fall becomes inevitable. Blake abhors man made laws because they can not account for the difference and diversity within the human community. Laws are unjust as they are applied to all blindly without taking into account the heterogeneous nature of society. Society is a blend of different temperaments, dispositions and personalities. Within a single world there are as many worlds as there are individuals because every individual being has a personality quite distinct and different from every other.

Tiriel is a tyrant who rules by oppression and repression. He overthrows his own parents, Har and Heva. He forces his brother Ijim into exile in the wastelands, and chains Zazel, his other brother, in a cave in the mountain. Not happy with only this, he makes his own children slaves. But Heuxos, Tirel’s eldest son helped by his siblings, rebels and overthrows Tiriel. Though his children offer him refuge Tiriel refuses and goes into exile in the wilderness with his wife, Myratana. The poem begins in the ‘medias res’ showing the now blind Tiriel returning to the kingdom, he previously ruled. His wife is dying, and he wants his children to see her death. He accuses them of being responsible for her destitute state and curses them for betraying him five years before. Soon thereafter, Myratana dies, and his children once again ask Tiriel to remain in the palace but he refuses and returns to the wilderness. He goes on cursing
them and telling them he will have his revenge. After some time wandering, Tiriel reaches the Vales of Har, where he finds his own parents, Har and Heva. However, they have both grown old and scrawny and have regressed to a childlike state to such an extent that they believe their protector, Mnetha, is their mother. Despite being recognized by Har, Tiriel lies and keeps his identity a secret. He tells them that he was thrown into exile by the gods and his race was destroyed by them. Har and Heva are animated by Tieral's visit. They ask Tiriel to help them catch birds and listen to Har's singing. Tiriel refuses to stay however and begin again his wanderings. He then meets his brother Ijim in the forest. At first Ijim threatens to kill him, but upon seeing Tiriel's weakened state, he is filled with sympathy for him. Ijim carries him back to the palace. He is dismayed to see that Tiriel's children refuse to accept him even when he is a mere skeleton. Ijim's leaves and after his departure, Tiriel descending ever more hurriedly into lunacy, curses his children yet more fervently. With that cursing, four of his five daughters and one hundred of his one hundred and thirty sons are destroyed, including his son Heuxos. Tiriel then asks his youngest daughter, Hela, to lead him back to the Vales of Har. She agrees, but condemns and accuses Tiriel for his actions. Tirel is filled with wrath and he turns her hair into snakes. On the way through the mountains Tiriel and Hela pass the cave in which lives Zazel. Zazel with his sons throws filth and stones at Tiriel and Hela. They poke fun at them as they pass. At last Tiriel and Hela reach the Vales of Har. In his last speech, Tiriel denounces his parents, his children and all society. He expands on how his father's laws and his own wisdom all end in a curse. He then breathes his last at his parents' feet.

Trial as a character in the poem is seen as one who puts a constraint on the desires of men. He is a tyrant and a hypocrite. He puts curse on his own children and finally
reaches his own fall. Tiriel forms laws of morality which are impossible to keep and he is filled with disdain for those who transgress them. His children have no choice but to rebel and overthrow him. He is overthrown by his own children because they can no longer stand his cruelty and tyranny. They taunt him when he curses them because they know that it in only after rebellion that the yoke of slavery will be removed from their necks.

Old man! unknowing to be call'd the father of Tiriel's race!

For everyone of those wrinkles, each of those grey hairs
Are cruel as death and as obdurate as the devouring pit!
Why should thy sons care for thy curses, thou accursed man?
Were we not slaves till we rebel'd? Who cares for Tiriel's curse?
His blessing was a cruel curse. His curse may be a blessing.  

Quite in accord with the arguments in "Tirial", Kahlil Gibran, in the first part of "Kahlil the Heretic" from Spirits Rebellious, writes about a rich man and shows how the rich man exploits the poor and manipulates their minds and forces them into slavery. The story shows cruelty of the rich on the poor. It talks about how much the poor are afraid of raising their voice in the face of tyranny. In the third part of the story Gibran criticizes the clergy in the form of a young man. This young man was expelled from the convent because he dared to rebel against the false aims and methods of clergy. He told the clerics that they are robbing and looting the common people of their money and property. He detested the clergy because they violated the rights of poor orphans. He told them that they sell their prayers in order to add to their riches.

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31 Blake Complete Writings, p. 99.
My stomach could not hold bread baked with the tears of orphans. My lips could not utter prayers sold for gold and food by the heads to the simple and faithful people. I was expelled from the convent like a filthy leper because I was repeating to the monks the rules that qualified them to their present position.32

Later this man goads his people to rebel against cruel forces and they succeed in overthrowing the tyrant. One of the passages of this story which directly relates with Blake’s Tiriel is:

A father who makes his son a slave is the father who gives his child a stone when he asks for bread. Have you not seen the birds of the sky training their young ones to fly? Why then, do you teach your children to drag the shackles of slavery?33

In Blake’s poem “Tiriel”, it was the father who had made his sons his slaves. He had put all kinds of constraints on their activities. He had confined them in the prison of laws which he had framed in order to perpetuate his rule and authority.

It is not only in his longer and complex works that Blake comes out as a staunch rebel but in his simple and lucid songs he shows the same spirit. “The Chimney Sweeper” of Songs of Innocence shows Blake’s indignation towards child labor. For Blake children are innocent and happy creatures by their very nature and should be given all the freedom in the world to play and enjoy. Children are forced by the cruel society to work. This poem is a strong criticism on the society and the people responsible for making the lives of children miserable, sad and dull. In fact parents

33 Ibid., pp. 327-328.
themselves sell their children because being poor they cannot feed and bring them up. It is a pity to see juvenile children working when they should have been playing and enjoying. The very first stanza reads as:

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry ‘weep!’ ‘weep!’ ‘weep!’
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.\(^\text{34}\)

_Songs of experience_ has many poems which come up with a strong social protest. In ‘Holy Thursday’ Blake castigates and lambasts the clergy and the society for reducing children to misery. The sun never shines and the rain never falls in their life because they are exploited by the Orthodox Church. These poor children live a miserable life. They are underfed. Their whole childhood is spent in weeping and their lives are ruined and spoiled.

The first three stanzas of “Holy Thursday” are:

Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?

\(^{34}\) _Blake’s Poetry and Designs_, Edit. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: Norton, 1979) 25.
It is a land of poverty!

And their son does never shine,
And their fields are bleak and bare,
And their ways are filled with thorns:
It is eternal winter there.\(^{35}\)

In "The Chimney Sweeper" one can see Blake castigating the church and the state for making people and their children wretched. Even the parents are not spared for exploiting their own children in making them work instead of giving them required freedom to grow. Blake, a social rebel, believes that the priests as well as the state make use of religion in order to gain material prosperity. These cruel forces cannot see the happiness of children and hence fill their lives with sadness, affliction and woe. Blake goes deep into the psyche of children. Children, even if they are seemingly happy while performing their chores, they are not so in reality. Deep in their hearts they feel the pain and suffering and pray for the end of their confinement. They long and crave for their freedom. The last two stanzas of the poem are:

'Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smiled among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

'And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God and His priest and king,

Who makes up a heaven of our misery.\textsuperscript{36}

In “London” Blake comes out as a true social rebel. The poet while observing people in the streets of London sees despair in their faces and feels apprehension and repression in their voices. Their minds and hearts are full of dread and terror. The seed of fear has been sown deep in their minds and they are led as slaves by the powerful. The mournful cry of the chimney-sweeper stands as a sentence on the Church and its high handedness. The blood of a soldier blemishes the walls of the ruler’s dwelling. The cursing of prostitutes corrupts the newborn infant and slanders the institution of marriage. In this poem Blake once again castigates the church and the state for oppressing people in the name of religion and patriotism. State leads to wars and bloodshed. Church is responsible for child labour. These agencies of repression manipulate the minds of people into meek submission. Blake criticizes the institution of marriage because the church forces the marriage to consummate even where there is no natural love. This poem needs to be reproduced in full:

\begin{verbatim}
I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 46.
The mind forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls;
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new born Infant's tear,
And blights with plague the marriage hearse.  

Kahlil Gibran quite in accord with Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, in one of his prose pieces called "Slavery" from *Between Night and Morn*, laments the fate of Man who has lived in a perpetual state of slavery since he came into this world. He is a slave of life itself and life constantly drags him into submission of different sorts. Gibran like Blake voices the idea that at every level of the hierarchy in the society we live as slaves. They structure of the society is such that nobody has freedom. This is a curse of civilization that everybody is a slave of some other person.

And I saw the apprentice slaving for the artisan, and the artisan slaving for the employer, and the employer slaving for the solider, and the soldier slaving for the governor, and the governor slaving for the king and the king slaving for the priest …

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37 Ibid., p.53.
38 *The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran*, p. 120.
In “Decayed Teeth” from *Thoughts and Meditations*, Gibran vehemently criticizes the corrupt politicians and leaders. He says that there are lots of decayed teeth in the form of corrupt people and practices in the mouth of his homeland. But the so called social reformers and leaders never try to extract these decayed teeth. They never try to apprehend the real criminals as they roam free without the fear of chastisement. Instead, they mask their crimes and present them as honest, sincere and true.

In the mouth of society are many diseased teeth, decayed to the bones of the jaws. But society makes no effort to have them extracted and be rid of the affliction. It contents itself with gold fillings. Many are the dentists who treat the decayed teeth of society with glittering gold.\(^{39}\)

In “Narcotics and Dissecting Knives” from *Thoughts and Meditations*, Gibran scathingly criticizes the Orient for its lazy and passive people. Orient is full of superstitions. Gibran resents the Oriental people because in his opinion they hate truth and love falsehood and hypocrisy. They praise the oppressor and ignore the oppressed. If some social rebel or a social reformer raises his voice, he is silenced either by force or by using money.

About his own rebellious nature and about what the society thinks of him, Gibran writes:

He [Gibran] is excessive and fanatic to the point of madness. Though he is an idealist, his literary aim is to poison the mind of youths. ... If men and women were to follow Gibran’s counsels on marriage, family ties would break,

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 31.
society would perish, and the world would become an inferno peopled by
demons and devils.\textsuperscript{40}

He further writes:

Such is what people say of me and they are right, for I am indeed a fanatic and
I am inclined toward destruction as well as construction. There is hatred in my
heart for that which my detractors sanctify, and love for that which they reject.
And if I could uproot certain customs, beliefs and traditions of the people, I
would do so without hesitation.\textsuperscript{41}

William Blake’s and Kahlil Gibran’s harsh criticism of the ways men conduct
themselves explains why all of the major figures in their poems are rebels and
outlaws. Their heroes try to preserve their identity in a world governed by stereotyped
man-made laws which are cruel and rigid to the core.

What Mona Wilson writes about Blake holds true about Gibran as well:

He dreamt, it would seem of a time when the return of the Golden Age was
very near, when human nature had so changed that selfhood, jealousy, and lust
were banished from the earth.\textsuperscript{42}

And Northrop Frye writes, “Society to Blake is an extremely unwilling recipient of
culture: every genius must fight society no matter what his age.” The word ‘genius’ is
applicable to both Blake as well as Gibran, for both of them apart from being creative
writers par excellence, stood for the forces of rebellion and change in their respective

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40}Ibid., p. 94.
\item \textsuperscript{41}Ibid., p.95.
\item \textsuperscript{42}Mona Wilson, \textit{The Life of William Blake} (London: Oxford University Press, 1971)72.
\end{itemize}
Chapter-5

Myths, Symbols and Stylistic Innovations in Blake and Gibran
Myths, Symbols and Stylistic Innovations in Blake and Gibran

Myths, symbols and imagery are indispensable for communicating higher truths because these images, myths and symbols are always present in human thinking and human expression and without taking help from these devices any direct description of a poetic experience is near impossible to man. Poetry generally suggests or hints and always tells the truth indirectly. When the symbols which are used in poetry have greater suggestive quality, they evoke in readers more answering emotions and convey truths quite easily. They also add to the curiosity of readers to know more and more. Effective symbolism, for that reason, is more than mere diagram or mere allegory. It is vibrant, vigorous and lively. Good symbolism brings with it hints of mystery and wonder. It enchants with its magic the mind to which it is addressed. Its appeal is not to the clever brain, but to the yearning and longing heart and to the intuitive sense of man. In the rich and varied history of English literature it is the Romantic Movement which contributed significantly to the field of myths and symbols because almost all the romantic poets had a great fondness for them. Romantic poetry by and large works its magic with the help of myths and symbols. The most obvious and important function of myths and symbols is that they help in explaining abstract facts, both natural and cultural, which otherwise are very difficult to explain. They also help in making comprehensible supernatural phenomena which pervade the whole universe. Though poets in all ages have employed myths and symbols in order to convey their insightful thoughts but the case of William Blake is extraordinary and astonishing in certain ways. He invented his own mythology and his symbols are equally innovative, fresh and original. They are a landmark in the history of English poetry. With the help of his mythological vision Blake created an
original cosmology and a new world order. While being aware of the limitations of language it seems that Blake enjoyed exploring the potential ambiguity inherent in his craft. He adopted the problem of linguistic ambiguity itself and made it his spiritual mission to use the force of language against the power of reason. Through the manipulation of his language Blake forges ahead in his mission to communicate spiritual truths as far as his craft will allow. The prophetic books of William Blake are a treasure house of a rich invented mythology (mythopoeia). It is within these invented myths that Blake encoded his avant-garde spiritual and political thoughts and became prophet of a new millennium. The fact is that Blake's thoughts took the shape of myths. There was a profound correlation between his imagination and his use of myths. In the words of Kathleen Rain: "Blake, however, from the outset imagined mythologically, his poetic universe is populous with ephemeral spirits of flower and insect, energies of the human soul, transient or abiding, as are the gods of traditional pantheons."  

The aspiration to reconstruct and restructure cosmos in accordance with his own insights and beliefs is at the center of Blake's work and his psychology. He designs a world which is completely his own. Since Blake did not agree with many teachings of the orthodox Christian church, he invented a private mythology which is a unique combination of both the Bible and Greek mythology. His prophetic works are largely saturated with his personal mythology and hence are extremely complex. They are to a large extent unfathomable to the average novice reader. But his poetry is not obscure as the students of literature generally believe. Once a reader becomes familiar with his use of symbols and myths, the narrative he employs in his poems unfolds.

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itself with quite an ease. One has to master the skill of reading Blake because without
proper grounding it is not easy to understand his later poetry. The proper
understanding of his basic symbols and myths is necessary in order to comprehend his
seemingly simple lyrics and poems which he wrote in his youth. According to
Kathleen Raine, “Much that is obscure in Blake’s writing becomes clear as we begin
to learn his symbolic terms.”

His symbolic characters were all invented by him and they reveal his
nonconformist radical social and political concerns. Blake had a great passion for
originality and imagination and this became the cause for his creation of a private
cosmology which is found in both his lyric and prophetic poetry. In the most general
terms, his mythological and symbolic scheme designs a universe in which large-scale
activities and minutest details reflect firm but changeable relationships between
reason, emotion, love, poetry, energy, and other vital forces. These vital forces appear
most prominently in the symbolic mythology of the prophetic books and reveal
themselves in the guise of such titanic characters as Urizen, Luvah, Los and Orc.
After thorough analysis one can see that these powers are integral to the symbolism of
the lyric poems as well. Blake developed his mythology mainly in painting and
prophetic books. It is a seemingly strange but no doubt magnificent mythology as it
makes use of various wide spread sources to create allegories in order to communicate
his ideas. Blake creates his system of symbols to present the facts and events which he
witnessed in the spiritual world. He was trying to portray in human language the
eternal visions which could not be fully described in literal language. Blake associated
poetry with allegory because, in his understanding of it, poetry was concerned with
something other than the phenomenal world, and according to him the only device

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suitable to describe it was what he called allegory. He writes to Thomas Butts: “Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding is my definitions of the most sublime poetry.”

To say that Blake invented the myths and symbols without taking recourse to any existing source is false. Reading his works it is not difficult to find that the main sources for his mythology and symbols are the Bible, mainly the Old Testament and the characters from the Bible like Adam and Eve, Cain, Joseph and Jesus. The other sources for his mythology are old legends of Albion like figures and real men who lived in blood and flesh like Newton and Locke. He invented some using his own vibrant imagination like Orc, Urizen and Los. These figures were part of his personal vision and they helped him to build up his prophetic vision. He used them in disapproving the Orthodox Church and the corrupt state. He used them in advocating imagination, energy and in integrating hell with heaven and experience with innocence. In the course of writing his prophetic books Blake gained complete expertise in the use of myths and symbols. Blake quite successfully integrated symbolic themes of great depth into his mythology. According to Kathleen Raine, “When Blake incorporated a symbolic theme into his own mythology he was content with nothing less than complete mastery both of the minute particulars of image and metaphysical content.”

Blake uses myths and symbols to imbue the metaphysical and religious concepts with life, gives them a form, and clothes them in gigantic humanity. All this helps him to give a secular and a humanist colouring to religious concepts. Religion becomes more of a human issue rather than an institution detached from the affairs of the

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4 Blake and Antiquity, p. 35.
world. Metaphysics in his hands becomes a day to day reality. He used different voices in his poems to relate to the reader and put forth his own ideas about human existence. Albion (the ancient man) is one of Blake’s greatest mythological symbols. It symbolizes England and also the fallen personifications of all humankind. His emanation is Jerusalem and his daughters are women of England. The emanation is a feminine counterpart separated from an integral masculine entity. The parts into which Albion is divided are the four Zoas: (i) Tharmas is a self governed by instinct. It also represents strength. (ii) Urizen symbolizes tradition. He is a cruel god. He believes in oppression. He also exemplifies reason. He is associated with intellect and with various forms of rationalisms, literalism and materialism. (iii) Luvah is related to love, passion and emotive faculties. His most ardent and rebellious form is Orc. Orc symbolizes the force of revolution. (iv) Urthona is also known as Los and he symbolizes inspiration and imagination. Many of his characters quite remotely and roughly resemble various more familiar beings from various mythologies but by renaming them Blake specified that we need to begin afresh with them as characters. In the words of Jacob Bronowski:

> We mistake the language, and we mistake the meanings, of Blake’s prophetic books, if we forget the reasons which made Blake choose and change that language. Blake chose his prophetic symbols because he found them apt to what he was saying; but he changed their meanings, as the reason for their aptness changed.  

Blake utilizes symbolism because he seeks to transfer a sense of consciousness to the reader and this device best suits his purpose. He attempts to articulate the

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inexpressible experience which is generally beyond reason and ordinary intellect. His focus is on the inner spiritual life which led him to mystic paths and to the position of sublime consciousness, and gave rise to his symbolic poetry. Most of the characters used by Blake are allegorical beings with multiple significations analogous simultaneously to such things as mental faculties, emotions, and psychological categories, political figures, geographical entities, body parts and so forth. But Blake’s characters may change in drastic manner; especially when they are separated from their emanations. Characters from one context may be presented from a very different perspective elsewhere, even in the same work, and may be known by several different names and can have contrasting functions in different settings. The Blake pantheon also includes feminine emanations that have separated from an integrated male being as Eve separated from Adam. Enion is an emanation from Tharmas. She personifies bodily or material impulse. The celestial Ahania is an emanation of Urizen. She is associated with pleasure and also charity. The musical Enitharmon is an emanation of Los. Her name suggests harmony. Blake pantheon includes many characters who are in some ways similar to Orc and personify revolutionary wrath. Bromian is lustful and loud. He is like the god Dionysius, a roarer. Palambron is mild and piteous, though he emerges in response to oppression.

Blake’s prophetic books may be filled with references to cosmological powers derived from the long ago Gnostic tradition but he is in fact concerned with the epic tragedy of mankind as man entered the world. He uses myths to tell the story of man. Apart from Blake’s use of myths, symbols too are one of the most striking features of his poetry. He uses symbols of energy, innocence, corruption, experience, sexual symbols and so on and so forth. Both in his myths and symbols, Blake’s intellect was stirred by Milton’s Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. He was greatly influenced
by the visions of Swedenborg, and the near-Cabalistic writings of Jacob Boehme. Blake despite being a pure romantic artist makes ample use of the Christian symbols like the Cross, the Saviour the Father and the Son but he doesn’t teach conventional Christianity through them.

Blake was also aware that new situations demand brand new myths and symbols. Keeping all this in view Blake always invested his symbols with originality and made them fresh and new.

A very fundamental reason for Blake’s rejecting an old order mythology and insisting on his own, then, was to disassociate his utterance from the literalness, the externality, to which older myths had been subjected; a literalness and externality so fast that the myths seemed no longer adaptable to fresh historical situations.

Throughout his works Blake’s objective is to explain man’s psychological states and conflicts, and their solution. And for this purpose he employs symbols and images. He wants to solve all the problems and dilemmas of humankind and answer all the mysteries. He employs mystic symbols which yield their importance not to external senses but to the spirit of man. They are not obvious to the intelligence. They are generally beyond ordinary understanding. But his use of symbols in his lyric poems is not complex. There is hardly any poem written by Blake even in his prime youth which does not possess a symbolic meaning, besides its apparent or surface meaning. For instance in “Earth’s Answer”, the bard, is the poet who is also inspired as a prophet, has also been symbolized as Christ who asks the mankind to wake up from

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its slumberous sleep. ‘Dew’ in Blake is often the symbol of materialism. In “Earth’s Answer” earth may be symbolized as a woman because earth gives birth to nature and to all that nature offers. The ‘watery shore’ and the ‘starry’ symbolize tyranny and oppression. ‘Selfish father’ represents the jealous god, a god of fear, Jehovah who is also called Urizen by Blake. Blake calls him ‘father of the ancient men’ and ‘selfish father of men’. This whole poem is an extended symbol of sexual repression. The metaphors like ‘sower’, ‘ploughman’, ‘plough’, and ‘chain’ add to the depth and meaning of the poem.

"Prisoned on watery shore,

Starry jealousy does keep my den

Cold and hoar;

Weeping o’re,

I hear the father of the ancient men.

‘Selfish father of men!

Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!

Can delight,

Chained in night,

The virgins of youth and morning bear?

"Does spring hide its joy,

When buds and blossoms grow?

Does the sower

Sow by night,

Or the plowman in darkness plough?"
"Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around!
Selfish, vain,
Eternal bane,
That free love with bondage bound.\(^7\)

The language of this poem is simple as is usual with his songs. This poem has five stanzas, each stanza having five lines. The rhyme scheme of first stanza is abaab. The second and the last stanza follow the same rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme of third stanza is abccb and that of fourth stanza is abcd. In the first stanza Blake has made abundant use of the alphabet ‘d’ and it fills the stanza with certain heaviness. The second line of the first stanza is the typical example of alliteration (‘darkness dread and drear’). In terms of meter, this poem is an irregular mixture of trochaic (like the lines ‘Earth rais’d up her head’ and ‘That free Love with bondage bound’) and iambic (like the line ‘When buds and blossoms grow’). In many lines we find extra unstressed syllables which give an unanticipated anapestic rhythm (for example, ‘From the darkness’ or ‘virgins of youth’). On the whole the consequence is that rhythms vary constantly as they are driven by potent emotive emphasis. This emotive emphasis comes from the poet’s and Earth’s natural need for self-expression, rather than by any fixed pattern. The shifting rhythms of the poem also give a flexible swiftness to this poem which alters with mood. For instance, the double stress (‘locks cover’d’) and open endings (like ‘grey despair’) slow the pace and this gentle pace goes well with the negative mood expressed. There is a wide difference in line-length. The setting of Earth’s imprisonment is telling. The landscape has become

more sterile and parched. There is nothing colourful about it. ‘Darkness’, ‘grey’, ‘starry’, ‘hoar’ and ‘night’ all add to this colourless picture. Other factors which in the poem further call attention to white, black and grey are the images like ‘Stony’, ‘Chain, and ‘Freeze’. All of these are colourless. Earth does not sense any softness or movement of water. Metal, stone and ice surround her.

Blake’s poem “London” is also full of symbols having multiple meanings. The word ‘chartered’ is usually used in industry, trade and commerce, but in this poem it has been used in a different meaning. It implies the street which has its economic value. It also means that the street is property of the powerful authorities. Water in the rivers stands for life and the enthusiasm to keep going. Water keeps us alive, and the river Thames is a symbol of life and rejuvenation. But here Blake uses the description ‘chartered’ for Thames too, for the reason that even this free gift of nature is owned by the dominant and mean authorities. A reader expects London to represents a cultured character as the city is very old, strong and well planned. It is a city which was known for its values and conventional ideals but it has of late seen innumerable vices. And what Blake has offered us in this poem, from a hasty glance it is evident that this city is decayed from within. The poet sees deep signs of weakness and misery on the faces of common people and no one escapes the misery and woe in this city. Children are innocent and they should not know ‘fear’, but in this city, children are used for manual labour. Their state is depressing. We see them as the blackened chimney sweepers. Children are being deprived from living innocently. Experience has been forced on them as they cry in pain and despair. The poet sees ‘marks of weakness, marks of woe’ in every face. He hears ‘the mind-forged manacles’ in every voice, whether of man or child. Then there is the soldier who scarifies his pride and sheds his blood in blind submission to the monarch. The word ‘hapless’ represents the
soldier’s hidden wish of not to take part in war and battle. It also shows that the soldier has no other job to do. There is no means of livelihood for him except through participating in wars. The Church is generally supposed to teach morals; cleanse and discipline the people but it fails to do so. It is blackened because it oppresses the poor and the week. The last stanza vehemently lambasts the institution of marriage when it is not supported by love and mutual understanding between the people involved. The images and symbols like ‘charted street’, ‘charted Thames’, ‘mind-forged manacles’, ‘blackening church’, and ‘marriage-hearse’ are very powerful and give this poem its unique character.

I wandered through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
A mark in every face I meet,
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackening church appals,
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace-walls.
But most, through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the marriage-hearse.\(^8\)

This poem consists of four quatrains with alternate lines rhyming. Repetition is the most prominent formal characteristic of the poem. It serves to stress the pervasiveness of the horrors and the terror the London city is witnessing. In the first stanza, Blake uses repetition two times. In his first use of the word 'charter'd', he is referring to the charters that allocated ownership and rights to particular people. Many conscious people, including Blake, saw this as depriving ordinary people of their civil liberties and freedom. The second use of repetition is with the word 'marks'. This has a double implication. It refers to the physical marks which people get as a result of the conditions they suffer, and it is also indicative of the speaker witnessing everything through his eyes during his stroll through the streets of London. Blake’s choice of words shows the spiritual and corporeal repression the common people of London undergo. Words and word combinations like 'mind forg-d', 'blights', ‘weakness’, ‘woe’, ‘blood’, ‘plagues’, ‘hearse’ show the poems negativity and reflects the suffering within London. Blake uses an uncomplicated structure in the form of a lyric poem to highlight the dullness and tedium in the lives of average people of London. The structure is also useful in the way that it is simple and song like and so does not divert attention from the message and theme of the poem. The poem ends with a shocking combination of words such as ‘marriage hearse’. Blake believed that marriage should be a celebration of love and the beginning of new life. But here Blake

\(^8\) Blake's Poetry and Designs, P. 53.
combines the word 'marriage' with the word 'hearse' - a vehicle associated with funerals. It is because the loveless marriage brings nothing but death and decay.

One of the most striking images and symbols in the Song of Experience is “The Tyger”. In the state of innocence the symbol of lamb is used to represent life. Lamb suggests innocence and ethical purity. The tiger, in comparison with the image of lamb, is an image associated with the world of experience. The tiger is unyielding, physically powerful, ruthless, but very beautiful and attractive. It demonstrates that all God’s creatures have their own exceptional splendor and unique place in the scheme of things. But there are other aspects to this fact. Even though the tiger is attractive and beautiful, it is a symbol of the aggressive and frightening forces for man. This is suggested in the phrase, ‘fearful symmetry’. Tiger is also an emblem of creation because it is full of life, vigor and enthusiasm. It is not necessary that we take Tiger of this poem as a concrete manifestation. The existence that is meant here can be the existence of the will of God. God may exist everywhere. Blake may be understood here as trying to characterize things in the sense of their spirit, not merely as physical reality. One can read this poem as Blake talking about human beings and the spirit they have. Then, there is a concealed meaning behind putting the brain of the tiger into furnace. Its interpretation can be that after getting out of the furnace, the tiger’s brain is remoulded into a benefactor tiger. This tiger will do good things as he fits well into the scheme of things planned by God. As God has created lamb as well as tiger it means good and evil are present simultaneously in this world. At the same time, the tiger is also a sign of the Creator’s masterly skill, which made possible for him to put in order the ‘fearful symmetry’ of the tiger. This poem has a great suggestive force which is worked out with the help of symbols. In fact this poem has been written in symbols as every word has a symbolic force pare excellence. The

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, and what art.
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?
Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?  

The poem has six quatrains all in rhymed couplets and the rhyme is assonant. It follows completely the pattern aabb. It is because of this pattern that in the first and the sixth stanzas, the word ‘symmetry’ has to be pronounced in such a way that it rhymes with the word ‘eye’; (A quatrain is a four-line stanza.) Each quatrains contains two couplets. (A couplet is a pair of rhyming lines). Thus we have a twenty four line poem with twelve couplets and six stanzas. The question in the final stanza repeats (except for one word, dare) the exact words of the first stanza, possibly signifying that the query Blake raises will continue to bewilder all the generations to come. The meter is regular and musical but with a hammering beat which brings to mind the ‘smithy’ that is the poem’s fundamental image. This poem has its own unique simplicity and its form has neat proportions. These qualities of the poem’s form perfectly suit its regular structure, in which a thread of queries all add to the expression of a single, fundamental thought. The poem is in trochaic tetrameter (a poetry line usually with eight syllables in which a stressed syllable is followed by an unstressed syllable) with catalexis at the end of each line. Catalysisus means the absence of a syllable in the final foot in a line. In Blake’s poem, an unstressed syllable is absent in the last foot of each line. Thus, every line has seven syllables, not the usual eight. However, this irregularity in the trochaic pattern does not harm the cadence of the poem. In fact, it may actually enhance the music Blake wants to generate. Each line ends with an accented syllable which perfectly seems to imitate the beat of the

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9 Blake’s Poetry and Designs, pp. 49-50.
hammer as it strikes the anvil. Blake has used the art of alliteration to great effect in this poem. For example in ‘Tyger, tyger, burning bright’ (line 1); ‘frame thy fearful symmetry?’ (line 4). He has used Metaphors like Comparison of the tiger and his eyes to fire and Anaphora i.e. repetition of words at the beginning of sentences or clauses. Examples are: ‘What dread hand and what dread feet? / What the hammer? What the chain?’ Blake has used allusions like ‘Immortal hand or eye for God or Satan, ‘Distant deeps or skies’ for hell or heaven. The poet has made ample use of symbols such as Satan for evil, Lamb for Goodness (or God), Distant Deeps for Hell, Skies for Heaven.

With regard to the semantic fields, there are words related to the equipments used by an ironsmith like ‘hammer’, ‘chain’, ‘furnace’, and ‘anvil’, in the fourth stanza. Also, we can find a semantic field related to Nature which is evoked through the words like ‘forests’ (line 2), ‘Skies’ (line 5), ‘Tyger’ (lines 1 and 21), and ‘Lamb’ (line 20). But, predominantly, the poet used a semantic field related to Creation when he writes words or phrases like:

“What immortal hand and eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?”

The plain structure and the easy vocabulary help the reader to appreciate the main topics or concepts, which are Evil, Good, and God.

Blake’s majestic symbolism, in truth, poses an intense challenge to readers, utterly beyond the scope of lesser individual way of thinking. Each must read and reread his symbols and grapple with them for himself and find their inmost meaning. Blake, because he lived at a particular moment in history, had to confront self-satisfied
materialists and rampant corruption in every sphere of life. He knew that the issues of his times could not be resolved by gentle reasoning, and this made him to employ the violent metaphors and rumble of his words as a prophet and a poet. It is generally believed that Blake’s mysticism contributes to his obscurity but that is not true. It is his use of complicated mythology which makes him a difficult poet.

It is time to argue that the central problem in William Blake, a puzzling poet, is not mysticism at all, as has been generally supposed, but mythology; a mythology which the poet, for reasons both of temperament and of history, was forced to invent; and for the materials of which he turned to a wide variety of documents, some of which are mystical.¹⁰

When we take his narratives simply as stories, they are naïve and childlike. But they enlighten us with philosophical and universal knowledge. The language of Songs of Innocence and Experience is like that of Bible. Christ is a good shepherd as well as the Lamb of God. By ‘Sunflower’ he symbolizes the yearning of youth for liberty in love. The ‘Lily’ is used as a symbol for cleanness of love and also of sincerity and open-heartedness in love. ‘Rock’ in Blake is a symbol of impenetrability of substance and petrifaction of life. ‘Chain’ symbolizes intellectual imprisonment and dullness. ‘Thunder’ symbolizes oppression.

Blake also wanted a change in prosody. His poetry is highly individual in style and technique. Blake’s innovation kept him at a distance from general public. We can hardly identify any other English poet whose temperament showed a greater individuality than him. His individuality bordered on oddity. Blake announced in the preface to Jerusalem his emancipation from the monotony and dullness of metered

¹⁰ Mark Schorer, “Mythology (For the Study of William Bake).” p. 366.
poetry. According to Mona Wilson, “Blake could never use the Augustan meters whether deliberately or out of not knowing about it.”\textsuperscript{11} In the words of Bloom, “Blake is one of the technical masters of English poetry; whatever he wanted to do he could do.”\textsuperscript{12} As early as in his poetical sketches, he successfully did away with end rhyme. He substituted end rhyme with rhythmical devices such as word repetition that he afterwards used to great advantage in his \textit{Songs of Innocence and Experience}. The poems in the latter works are also distinguished because of their compression and economy; however Blake appears to have deemphasized these qualities when he chose the lengthy septenary line (containing seven metrical feet) for the \textit{Four Zoas, Milton and Jerusalem}. The rhetorical free-verse lines of his poems require new methods of reading. Mona Wilson says, “Like his meter, his diction anticipates freedom discovered a generation later by Coleridge and made over by him to the use of all future poets.”\textsuperscript{13}

Though Blake and Gibran had many similarities in terms of the subject matter and themes of their works but their styles don’t match except for Blake’s earlier works. The poems of \textit{Songs of Innocence and Experience} have the simplicity of diction and the melody which we find throughout Gibran’s writing. Bowra referring to Blake’s earlier works writes, “Indeed, no English poet, except Shakespeare, has written songs of such lightness and melody.”\textsuperscript{14} In the same way as Blake, Gibran’s language is rich, layered, harmonious, and full of musical qualities and highly electric, while often at the same time appearing quite uncomplicated. It was his simple and imaginative style which made his work famous in both Arabic speaking and English speaking world.

\textsuperscript{13} Mona Wilson, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{14} Maurice Bowra, \textit{The Romantic Imagination} (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) 43.
Gibran likeBlake had a profound feeling for language and chose his words with care. Gibran believed with Blake that words as they are used in creative literature are everlasting and they are an indefinite source of meaning, sounds and associations which is absent in ordinary speech. They both as poets always understood that their visions of eternity were untranslatable. The effort of describing their visions, through the medium of language was a constant struggle for them, but at the same time it was a delicate process that helped them to polish their diction. That is why they were able to transform even the most ordinary words into very meaningful metaphors and images. Gibran employs myths very rarely and he has no mythological system as such but his poetry centers around one great living narrative, the holy Bible. El-Hage believes that Gibran like Blake created his own world with the help of his sharp imagination and great vision and some of his works are grand myths if nothing else. He writes:

The maker of the myths, and the weaver of the vision, is one who believes in his own representations as historical realities, a man who creates the fabric of his own world, and invites others to dwell in it. In this sense, Blake’s prophetic works, and Gibran’s The Prophet and Jesus the Son of Man are myths.¹⁵

Gibran likeBlake makes ample use of symbols throughout his writings. He used a method of writing which best enabled him to widen the limits of language. According to El-Hage, “Both men created a literary and stylistic revolution within their

languages.”16 Both these poets faced the dilemma of having to express the inexpressible. That is why they firstly chose poetry and secondly utilized the literary device of symbolism. Poetic signification is sought in order to attempt transmitting gnosis to the reader. Because the poets are creators and their creations are new even to them most of the times, the two poets refused to accept the systems of other men, or the symbols of old tradition. Very much like Blake, Gibran takes a lot of help from Bible especially Gospels. In the words of Joseph P. Ghougassian, “It is important to keep in mind that the Bible has always been for Gibran, as it was for Blake, a source of prophetic inspiration that presented a visionary narrative of the life of man between creation and apocalypse.”17 Apart from Bible and Blake, Nietzsche was also a major influence on Gibran. He has most influenced Gibran’s method of expression. From him he learnt how to communicate his ideas in a prophetic overtone. He in the same way as Nietzsche used provocative and inciting style for reproaching organized religion and the state institutions. Gibran always appreciated Nietzsche’s style of writing especially in his Thus Spake Zarathustra. All his works, particularly The Prophet, The Madman, The Forerunner, and The Tempest reverberate with Nietzschean influence particularly in their mythical style, parallelism, biblical language, repetition, etc. Ghousgassian writes:

Of course, it is Friedrich Nietzsche, the Psalms, and the Bible filled with parables, that gave a definite literary direction to Gibran. From Nietzsche he not only borrowed Zarathustra’s form of expression which is quite similar to Christian Gospels, but he also acquired from Nietzsche the flair for mingling emotions and thoughts, sorrow and happiness. As from the Bible he learned

16 Ibid., p. 19.
the old Semitic literary figure of parables, metaphors, anthropomorphism and cosmomorphism.\textsuperscript{18}

Gibran was not a great poet in verse, and most of his writing in poetic prose cannot be viewed as poetry proper, however he opened doors to a new kind of creativity. He makes use of interrogatives, repetitions, and the vocative very often. According to Najjar “... the fluidity of his sentences, his use of parallelism, repetition, antonyms, his profusion of allusions an allegorical images charge his writing with emotion and poetry.”\textsuperscript{19} His evocative imagery is full of vigour and is permeated with lot of emotion. Like all celebrated names in the history of writing, Gibran’s writings distinguishes itself by an individual style which is easily recognized as his and for which he is famous. Gibran is known for his extraordinary qualities of using language which make the ‘Gibranian style’ a synonym for innovation and eccentricity. The most noticeable stylistic features found in his writing are a series of continuous parallelism and antithetical statements. Gibran gave Arabic literature an exclusively new and inventive vocabulary which challenged the formal traditional language. His style is an attractive combine of beauty and spirituality. Gibran believed in innovation in style while writing, throwing conventions to the winds. He had a sense of rhythm and was one of the pioneers of poetic prose. His style reminds us of the Psalms, The Song of Songs, and \textit{The Book of Job}.

In form these 'rhythms' – the poetry of Gibran – are comparable to nothing so nearly as to the King James Version of the English Bible. The same clarity of

\textsuperscript{18} A \textit{Third Treasury of Kahlil Gibran}, p. 205.
expression, the same simplicity, the same power of enchantment are here, and
his phrase and his imagery derive, naturally, from the same ancestry.\textsuperscript{20}

Gibran’s magnum opus *The Prophet* is a marvel of technical virtuosity. The Prophet
reads like a holy book. Its style, its structure and its tone are to a large extent similar
to those of the Bible, and especially to the Gospels. This book is very rich in imagery,
allusions and parables and it is written in beautiful verse. As an example see the lines
in which Gibran talks about love.

When love beckons to you follow him,
Though his ways are hard and steep
And when his wings enfold you yield to him,
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you
And when he speaks to you believe in him,
Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind lays waste the
garden
For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your
growth so is he for your pruning.
Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that
quiver in the sun,
So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.\textsuperscript{21}

We notice that Gibran in the first six lines of this selection uses parallel structures.
Each Structure begins with a ‘When-clause’. Each clause lays down a condition
which must be fulfilled. And after every clause there is a warning that if u go ahead

\textsuperscript{20} Barbara Young, *This Man from Lebanon: A Study of Kahlil Gibran* (New York: Knopf, 1945) 33.
and do the action such and such thing will happen. This construction is repeated three times. This is an example perfect parallelism. There are numerous examples of parallel structures in the book. For instance, after the first six lines Gibran uses the pattern 'even as ... so' comparing different actions which are contradictory in nature. For example, 'For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you'. He uses the pairs of antonyms to highlight the paradoxical nature of actions like: 'crown/crucify', 'growth/pruning', 'ascend/descend', 'caress/shake', 'branches/roots'.

In the selection from The Prophet, entitled On Work, a particular word at the end of each line appears somewhere at the beginning of the following line. This structure gives this passage a spiral pattern and also the syntactic structure is repeated throughout the passage.

And I say that life is indeed darkness save when there is urge,
And all urge is blind save when there is knowledge,
And all knowledge is vain save when there is work,
And all work is empty save when there is love;
And when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself,
and to one another, and to God.  

In this selection the first four lines repeat parallel structures. There is also recurrence of the same words and ideas giving the passage its unique coherence. The last two lines conclude the discussion.

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22 The Greatest Works of Kahlil Gibran, p. 33.
Conclusion
Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to examine two poets William Blake and Kahlil Gibran with the intention of reading and comparing them and finding common threads of thought between them. Blake and Gibran lived in different countries, grew in different cultures and traditions and this study was undertaken to compare the two in order to see how they had strong affinities in terms of their social rebellion, social reform, spirituality, mysticism, romanticism and also in their style of writing to some extent.

In the introductory chapter it was stated that there are ample similarities between these particular romantic-mystics and symbolic poets to validate the creation of a new, better defined area of interdisciplinary research. This thesis has attempted to apply the tools of comparison and analysis. It was not found necessary to apply theory whether classical or modern to the works of the two writers because the area under discussion does not demand that. To examine their work according to usual methods of literary criticism is insufficient. This thesis has attempted to create a more specified research, using a traditional method of analyses by comparison. The primary texts of the two writers have been read in detail and then compared with each other for their content as well as the form. It has been found that the philosophy, thoughts, insights and visions of William Blake and Kahlil Gibran are distinctly similar in varied ways.

As for as their style of writing is concerned, it has been found that they have marked differences with the exception to Gibran’s style which is very simple and lucid resembling Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience. The innovations in form which Blake did in his prophetic works mark him as a very strong and sublime poet and distinguish him from the Lebanese American, Kahlil Gibran.
Through five chapters of comparative analysis this thesis has explored the similarities between Blake and Gibran and has attempted to identify them as important romantic poets within their own literatures, sharing some key characteristics. It was found that substantial similarities exist between the two poets despite enormous differences in terms of historical time, culture, country and education. It is necessary to point out that for Blake and Gibran, the greatest literary work is that which is inspired by pure imagination but at the same time they talked profusely about the social issues of their times. They were not disturbed by current literary traditions or expectations of readers because they were completely conscious of their inability to communicate spiritual gnosis through the conventional means. The characteristics which were found common in the two writers are: an intense, inner spiritual focus because of which they rebelled against doctrinal religion and orthodox church; criticism of human rationality and utilization of literacy symbolism; a recurrent focus on the subjects like imagination, intuition, perception and their call for spiritual revival, love of innocence, nature, beauty, and childhood; their staunch rebellion against the tyranny of state and all other social institutions; their strong support for women and a strong dislike of patriarchy.

In the course of the five chapters of this thesis Blake and Gibran have been compared and their essential common characteristics have been explored. This thesis is a journey from the poetry into the poetics of two writers. It was found that Gibran was not a mere imitation of Blake. He found the support and affirmation for his early principles and beliefs in Blake’s works and developed them in his own unique way. The method of approach was fundamentally an individual one. First, Gibran’s and Blake’s writings were read separately in their own contexts and then compared with
each other. This research employed a biographical approach and also focused on the close readings of the writings of original texts of the two writers.

The thesis is divided into five chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. Blake and Gibran were not compared in all the chapters but the main chapters thoroughly compared the works of the two writers. Their social, political, and economic context, their vision and worldview have been evaluated in comparison with each other.

In chapter I of the thesis Blake and the context against which he wrote have been discussed at length. The chapter discusses the inception of romanticism in England and claims that Blake was its chief originator. Some poems from Poetical sketches and Songs of Innocence and Experience have been discussed in detail in order to understand the romantic themes employed by Blake. Examples from some of his other later works have also been given.

Chapter II deals with Gibran, his life, his writings and his chief preoccupations as a writer. It traces Gibran’s evolution as a writer and the foreign influences he absorbed after migrating to the US. This chapter focuses on Gibran’s contribution to Arab romanticism and the main romantic features of his writings and finally claims that he was the pioneer of Romantic Movement in Arabic art and letters. It talks about how he introduced western romanticism into Arabic Literature. He developed a new form called the prose poem. He was interested in imagination, nature, childhood, love, beauty, liberty etc. like English romantics. The chapter also discusses his social rebellion, mysticism, social reform, love of nature, imagination, solitude, instinct and intuition and his immense contribution to Arabic literature and the innovations he brought into it.
Chapter III compares mystical thoughts which run through the works of Blake and Gibran. It talks about their difference as well as similarities as mystics rooted in different traditions. This chapter traces their development and evolution as mystics and studies influences which helped them to evolve. The chapter establishes that the essence of their mystical thought is same even though there are some minute differences of approach. It starts with the definition of mysticism and talks in detail about how a mystic perceives himself or herself vis-a-vis reality. Different mystics choose different paths to reach the same reality in order to experience divine consciousness, enlightenment and oneness with the Supreme Being. The chapter also discusses in detail the different schools of mysticism such as the Christian mysticism, the Islamic Sufism, Kabala, Gnosticism etc. It talks about how mystics have chosen poetry as a vehicle to convey their message because it is not easy to pass gnosis in any other medium. It tries to connect romanticism and mysticism. It talks in detail about Blake’s mystic status and how he used himself as the instrument of the divine. It mentions how Blake focused his life on the purpose of revealing higher truths. His spiritual life was more important to him than his creative life. He was a visionary mystic. He was a poet mystic. It talks about how Blake influenced poets who came after him like Yeats but he greatly influenced Gibran. Gibran like Blake was a poet mystic. Then the similarities in Blake’s and Gibran’s thoughts have been explored. Though Gibran was not a mystic proper but at moments he seems to be a mystic of higher order. How both used the gift of poetry to put through their gnosis. Blake’s search for spiritual truth has been related by analyzing his poems and mystical thoughts focusing on the poems from Songs of Innocence and Experience. Lines from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell have also been quoted. In the same way Gibran’s prose poems have been analyzed for their mystical content. The Prophet has been
analyzed in detail. Each of Gibran’s work can be read and interpreted in the light of Blake’s mystic thought.

Chapter IV is a comparative study of Blake’s and Gibran’s ideas of social rebellion, social protest and social reform. It deals at length with Blake’s and Gibran’s development as social critics. They both abhorred injustice of all kinds. They stood for the poor and the weak. They were severe critics of the Orthodox Church and the tyrant state. Blake and Gibran, though born in different countries and contexts, had strong affinities with each other. This chapter discusses in detail how Gibran came under the influence of Blake’s revolutionary vision, and how he, like Blake abhorred stale social customs and stood in rebellion against the institutions of state and church. Both stood for women’s emancipation and liberation. The religious beliefs of both Blake and Gibran were at odds with the common people as well as with religious authorities. Some important passages from the works of both writers have been analyzed in detail for their revolutionary and rebellious content and compared with each other in order to see the similarities as well as the impact of Blake on Gibran. It shows that Blake and Gibran were actively involved in the political development of their times. The chapter gives a detailed analysis and comparison of Blake’s *Vision of Daughters of Albion* and Gibran’s *Broken Wings* and how they both stood for the rights of woman and criticize false morals of the society. A detailed study of *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Gibran’s ‘John the Mad Man’ and ‘Cry of the Graves’ has been made. Blake’s *America, a Prophecy* and Gibran’s ‘My Countrymen’; Blake’s *Tiriel* and Girbrans ‘Kahlil, the Heretic’ have also been compared and analyzed. Some poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* have been compared with Gibran’s “Decayed Teeth”, “Slavery”, and “Narcotics and Dissecting Knives”.
Chapter V of this thesis discusses the style, use of prosody, symbols and myths employed by these two writers. It talks at length about Blake’s use of myths and symbols. This chapter talks about Gibran’s use of symbols and his deft use of language. However it has been found that there are not many similarities in their style or use of myths and symbols. Gibran’s works can be compared to Blake’s songs in their style but there is no comparison when it comes to the Blake’s prophetic works. It talks in detail about the relation of myths and symbols to poetry in general and romantic poetry in particular. Blake invented his own mythology and used fresh symbols. The chapter talks in detail about the mythic world and symbolic characters created by Blake and it nuances and subtleties. Blake had to take recourse to these myths and symbols because it was not possible otherwise to present his gnosis. Then some poems from Songs of Experience have been analyzed stylistically for their grammar, prosody, metaphors, structure etc. Gibran style and use of symbols was also discussed in detail. It was said that though Blake and Gibran had many similarities in terms of subject matter and themes of their works but their styles didn’t match except for Blake’s earlier works especially Songs of Innocence and Experience have the simplicity of diction and melody which we find throughout in Gibran’s writing. The influence of Blake, Bible and Nietzsche on Gibran’s style has been discussed in detail. Gibran contribution to Arabic literature in terms of style has been highlighted. Then some passages from The Prophet have been analyzed stylistically.

This thesis is a small foundational study which may be built upon. There is a possibility of further research and in order to contribute to the expansive interdisciplinary field of mystic and rebellious poetry, Gibran and Blake can be compared to some other writers like Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Shelley, Emerson, Tagore, Rumi, Kabir, Basho, Osho etc.
The present study of Blake and Gibran is itself a representation of a small corpus of work in comparative and interdisciplinary literature: much more research can be carried out in the interdisciplinary field of mysticism and poetry of rebellion.

The result of this thesis indicates that a certain amount of time and academic consideration might be given for the development of research into the relationship between the literatures of the west and the east in order to promote mutual understanding, peace and harmony because literature, to a great extent, encompasses all the facets of social, political, economic, cultural, ethical and spiritual fabric of the society. That will also help in appreciating and understanding literatures across cultures without any prior consideration for language and nationality.
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