

Romantic Individuation and Individualism: Re-reading William Blake’s Vision of Romantic “Thingliness”

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Abstract

In this article, we are introducing three terminologies, namely “Individuation”, “Individualism” and “Thingliness” as far as Blake’s Romantic vision is concerned. We posit that Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, besides portraying the two contrary states of the human person, are journeys of life from individuation, through individualism and back to individuation, rather to “Thingliness”. Put differently, the *Songs of Innocence* define who we are and the process by which we can fulfil our potential to become all that we can be (Individuation) whereas the *Songs of Experience* define what we have become (Individualism) and the process by which we can become what we were before (Thingliness). The first is a state of perfect harmony in the cosmos, the second is disharmony and the third is a journey back to the state of perfect harmony. To inform our discourse, we make recourse to the psychoanalytical theories of Carl Jung and Ecocriticism.

Keywords: Romanticism, Individuation, Individualism, Thingliness, Psychoanalyses, Ecocriticism, William Blake

Introduction

William Blake’s poetry has been the subject of many and diverse interpretations from critics and reviewers, with varied analyses of either individual poems, a collection of poems or even Blake’s vision as derived from his poetry in both the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. A good number of these critics and reviewers have pitted the Songs against each other in their contrary natures and states. Others, however, have given credence to what they call the silent voices in Blake’s *Songs*. William J. Martin (2013) contends that many critics of Blake:

...have focused their attention on the galaxy of characters whose voices are heard throughout Blake’s poems. These are the voices of London’s disenfranchised—the men, women and children who thronged London’s streets and whose piteous cries became the object of Blake’s concern. However, in addition to these spoken voices there runs throughout Songs an undercurrent of silent voices—voices that can be inferred, or as Blake would say, imagined—which speaks no less directly to the reader but which sustains Blake’s depiction of the frightful living conditions he witnessed daily in late eighteenth century London.(1)

In “The Unspoken Voice in William Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience” he thus gives a voice to Blake’s imagination—one that criticizes the London of the 18th Century as discerned from psychoanalysis of the poems. Jeannie Campe (2004) studies Blake’s theories concerning illustrative design and how it affects the reading of the poems. Chiramel Paul Jose (2015) has done an in-depth analysis of the two poems “The Lamb” and “The Tyger” against the background of the Bible. According to him, Blake set in the context of his idea of Innocence and Experience and at the same time deeming the text of the poems together with the painting on his illuminated page of that poem. Jose opines that a better understanding of these two poems is “purported at by having recourse to them in this three-fold way”. In the article, he tries to establish that the answer to Blake’s rhetorical question “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” is in the affirmative.

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Research Questions

In spite of the plethora of writing and critical discourse on Blake's poetry and philosophy, almost nothing has been said or written about the concepts of "Individualism" and "Individuation". This leads us to posing some fundamental questions about Blake's philosophic vision as discerned from the "Songs of Innocence" and the "Songs of Experience". When Blake subtitles his collection of poems "The Two Contrary States of the Human Soul", what exactly is he referring to? What do the "Songs of Innocence" carry as a philosophy? What is the underlying message behind the "Songs of Experience"? What is the place of the Nature of Things or Thingliness in Blake's poetry? What is Blake's poetic vision in relationship with "The Songs of Innocence and of Experience"? Is there a possibility for Man to return to his state of innocence?

Hypothesis

In an attempt to answer the questions asked above, we posit that Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, besides portraying the two contrary states of the human soul, are journeys of life from individuation, through individualism and back to individuation, rather to "Thingliness". Put differently, the *Songs of Innocence*, from a psychoanalytical perspective, define who we are and the process by which we can fulfil our potential to become all that we can be (Individuation) whereas the *Songs of Experience* define what we have become (Individualism) and the process by which we can become what we were before (Thingliness). The first is a state of perfect harmony in the cosmos, the second is disharmony and the third is a journey back to the state of perfect harmony.

Definition of Terms

Owing to the broad meanings of the terminologies used so far, it is propitious for these to be redefined within the context of this study. We shall therefore define "Individuation", "Individualism" and "Thingliness".

According to the *Collins Dictionary*, Individuation is "the act or process of individuating; the process by which the wholeness of the individual is established through the integration of consciousness and the collective unconscious." According to the Psychologist, Carl G. Jung, it is "the process of self-realisation, the discovery and experience of meaning and purpose in life; the means by which one finds oneself and becomes who one really is".

These two definitions, however brief, speak volumes about the definition of individuation given to this study and in tandem with Blake's philosophic vision. Blake's *Songs of Innocence* spell out the "wholeness of the individual", "self-realisation", "the experience of meaning and purpose in life", and the finding of oneself to ascertain what "one really is". This is to say that, from a psychoanalytical perspective, the *Songs of Innocence* capture the wholeness of life, the oneness or Unity of Being, in a way that makes the apparent fragmentation of life illusive given that a well-defined unity permeates the universe of things. Alexander Pope calls this "The Great Chain of Being"; Percy Bysshe Shelley calls it the "Everlasting Spring" or "The Golden Age" while for Blake himself it is "Cosmic Harmony". In the words of Alexander Pope in *An Essay on Man* (52) it is a state where "All are but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;" (lines 1 and 2). In other words, "individuation" is a perfect state of being where the animate and the inanimate, the organic and the inorganic, the fauna and the flora, the material and the immaterial form a Unity of Being. To Blake, as for other Romantics, this is achieved through the imagination.

The imagination is therefore the poet's gifted insight into the nature of things, which permits him to find some transcendental order that explains the world of appearances and accounts not only the existence of visible things but also the effects that these things have on society, deriving his authority from a certain invisible presence and power that moves the universe. Since the poet is a gifted seer beyond the physical frame of things, he uses this insight to recreate the world through a philosophic understanding of its inadequacies caused by man and socio-political behaviour that are not commensurate with the universal order as at Creation. It is this ability to see beyond the corporal frame of existence or the vegetable world that informs Blake's philosophic notion of Individuation, that perfect state of man where everything is at one with everything else, what Barry Commoner (1971), the Cellular Biologist and Professor in *The Four Laws of the Ecology* calls "The First Law of Nature", namely that:

Everything Is Connected To Everything Else. *There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all. Humans and other species are connected / dependent on other species. With this in mind it becomes hard to practice anything other than compassion and harmlessness. (3)*

From the above discussion therefore, we opine that the “Songs of Innocence” are the centrality of the poetic notion of individuation where the triangular relationship between God, Man and the Environment (the flora and the fauna) is made manifest by an invisible and subtle interconnectivity of individual species to form the WHOLE.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, “Individualism”, on the other hand, is “The habit or principle of being independent and self-reliant”; “Self-centred feeling or conduct; egoism”; “A social theory favouring freedom of action for individuals over collective or state control”. As a social psychological term “Individualism” refers to the ways in which people identify themselves and focus their goals. Individualism gives priority to personal goals (as opposed to the goals of a group or society). In addition, individualists tend to define their own identities according to their own personal behaviours and attributes.

From a Blakean perspective, Individuation gives way to Individualism as a consequence of man’s acquisition of experience. With experience man learns to break the Chain of Being through certain socio-political behaviours that are not akin to man’s original state as at creation. Cosmic harmony is thus replaced by disharmony, hatred, killing, commerce, non-vegetarianism and other social ills that distort the natural order of things. It is therefore a Blakean, as well as a Romantic visionary insight that man that has moved from individuation to individualism goes back to individuation for a certain cosmic realisation. This is what Carl Young calls “self realisation”. M.H Abrams (1973) in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* calls such a movement “the therapeutic drive”. According to him:

Man was destined to learn to seek out, by means of his own reason, the condition of innocence which he now lost, and as a free, reasonable spirit, to return to that place whence he had started out as a plant and creature of instinct: from a paradise of ignorance and bondage he was to work up, even if it should be after thousands of years, to a paradise of knowledge and freedom; one in which he would obey the moral law in his heart just as constantly as he in the beginning had obeyed instinct, and as plants and animals still obey it. (204)

This is what I call “Thingliness”. In philosophy, “Thingliness” according to the Collins English Dictionary is “the quality of having existence or of being a thing”. As earlier defined, it is the natural state of man as created by God in his felicity before the original scene of Adam and Eve that plunged the human race into chaos and informed Charles Darwin’s theories of “Survival of the fittest”, “Natural Selection” and “Geographical location”. Romantic Thingliness thus deconstructs these Darwinian theories and constructs a movement to a past and lost glory where like Percy Bysshe Shelley states in “Prometheus Unbound”:

The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise; but man
Passionless--no, yet free from guilt or pain, (Act III, 120-125)

At this stage therefore, the universe will be a classless society, void of kings and others, with citizens having equal rights and forming a universal brotherhood that speaks equality, peace and harmony among the different species. The difference among and between individual species will simply be apparent because there will be a subtle intermingling of the different elements of Nature or of THINGS and a commonality of language that permeates all things.

Songs of Innocence and Individuation

Blake’s “Songs of Innocence” make manifest the notion of Romantic Individuation as defined above. However, Deborah Guth (1989: 4) in *Innocence Re-called: The Implied Reader in Blake's Songs of Innocence* opines that although the songs of Innocence are apparently intended for children- “Every child may joy to hear”- closer analyses reveal...complex levels of discourse which are alien to the child’s world as well as implied situations and conflicting emotions glimpsed by innocence but properly belonging to the world of experience. She further states that although the poems of innocence speak of innocence, they foreshadow the coming loss of this innocence, stressing that childlike innocence is viewed from the adult experienced perspective. However, the reading given to the “Songs of Innocence”, our take is that the poems cannot be read as simple childlike rhymes.

It is indubitable that these poems speak of the joyful and playful nature of children and that their meanings announce the dangerous world of experience. That notwithstanding, the poems have deeper philosophical and psychological meanings that inform man's state of perfection where there is an umbilical cord relationship between the different elements that make up the cosmology of the poems.

The poem "Introduction" (Innocence) for instance, is a beautiful poem of an adult Piper who, piping down the "valleys wild", is instructed by a child that appears on the cloud to "pipe a song about a lamb" and to write down the song in a book so that many other children "may joy to hear". This is what the piper does and the child, before disappearing into the clouds, "wept with joy to hear". Guth (1989: 10) ascertains that this child of "the piper's imagination" contains and reflects the world of adult awareness.

A re-reading of the poems drives us into visionary worlds of interpretation where the cherubic child, the piper, "the valleys wild" and especially the subject of the song - "about a lamb" - form a certain cosmic harmony and share a commonality of language. The child that appears "on a cloud" could be likened to a prophet, a messenger of God. The "lamb" is likened to Christ whose coming and story have to be told to, and written by the Prophet, for the Universe - "the valleys wild" - to get the message and act it out for the salvation of humanity. "And I stained the waters clear" is the cleansing blood of the Lamb that biblically "takes away the sins of the world". In this poem therefore, the Introduction will be the Book of *Genesis*, the beginning of all things wherein God gives directives and instructions to man. Put differently, the poem talks about the biblical Garden of Eden before the original sin of Adam and Eve and the harmony therein where, like Alexander Pope (2010: 1-8) states in "Essay on Man":

ALL are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,
Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame,
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze, 5
Glow in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent: (52 :1-8)

In spite of the apparent differences between individual species therefore, the fauna and the flora, the material and the immaterial, the organic and the inorganic, brief, all elements of nature, although unique in their corporeal frames, form a whole. The physicality of Blake's worldview is not the issue here. According to C.M Bowra (1949: 14), although Blake, like other Romantics, has a keen eye on the visible world, his special concern was with the invisible. For him, "every living thing was a symbol of everlasting powers". This is why he described the "invisible in the language of the visible" which, like his contemporaries, he saw in his "inner vision" or the Imagination. Through this inner vision we see "Introduction" (Innocence) as a celebration of cosmic harmony and individuation. The physical environment is characterised by "the valleys wild", the "cloud", the "hollow reed", "the waters", and the "rural pen". This incorrupt environment is in harmony with the Piper and the subject of the song that he sings, in the same way as both are in harmony with God, the cosmic raw material, from whom other elements emanate. The point we are anxiously making here is that Blake uses the physical environment to talk about the invisible, that is, God's command and words in a society that is cosmic in character. This corroborates Barry Commoner (1971) in the *First Law of The Four Laws of Ecology* when he states that "Everything **Is Connected To Everything Else**" and that "There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all". (2) What Commoner means here, and to which we subscribe, is that in the poem, everything is connected to everything else. The Piper, the Child, the subject of the song, and the environment are subtly interconnected and dependent on each other, compassionate and harmless to each other, thus individuation.

Perhaps the most palpable examples are found in "The Lamb", "Nurse's Song", "Holy Thursday", "Chimney Sweepers" and others of Blake's Songs of Innocence wherein the notion of individuation finds a more suitable poetic and romantic expression. In "The Lamb" for instance, as in other poems, Blake uses the visible to apprehend the invisible. Better still; the poet uses the physical to talk about the spiritual and this is done through the imagination. Blake here becomes a gifted seer with insights into the Nature of things. This insight permits him to find some transcendental order that explains the world of appearances and accounts not only the existence of visible things but also the effects that these things have on society, deriving his authority from a certain invisible presence and power that moves the universe. The lamb as child thus has same characteristics as the lamb as animal.

Both are “meek” and “mild”, have a “tender voice, /Making all the vales rejoice?” with “Softest clothing, woolly, bright”. The human child and the animal lamb have an acknowledged connectivity between themselves which is further transcendently connected to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and the Cosmic Raw Material, the creator of both the child and the lamb. Christ became a little child like the child and calls himself a Lamb like the lamb. Christ is therefore in the child and in the lamb as both are also in Christ, all three sharing the same characteristic. As the poet poignantly states:

He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.
He is meek, and He is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee! (13-20)

The Lamb, the child and Christ thus have features that make them one, with interfusions into each other and enjoyments of the same pastoral landscape symbolic of the Garden of Eden, thus attaining the cosmic realisation of individuation.

The same thematic concern is manifest in “Nurse’s Song” and “Chimney Sweepers” (Innocence). The poem, “Nurse’s Song” is a pastoral poem that brings to the fore the concept of individuation as one that defines who we are and the process by which we can fulfil our potential to become all that we can be, namely, a universe of harmony where there is mutual understanding and where living together in an incorrupt landscape brings joy and happiness to everyone. Children under the charge of the nurse play in the field. As darkness approaches the Nurse requests them to go home but the children beg to continue playing because to them it is still day given that the sheep are still in the field and the little birds still fly in the sky. The nurse succumbs to their plea and the children are happy. The nurse is also happy to see the children play. Her «heart is at rest within (her) breast /And everything else is still” (3-4) when she hears their voices “on the green / And laughing is heard on the hill” (1-2). There is a sense of unity between human beings and the natural world. The Nurse’s initial tranquillity is at one with the evening’s natural stillness. Both seem to envelop the carefree children in a tender protection. The children see themselves as part of nature. They recognize themselves in the “little birds” and in the “sheep”. They cannot bear the thought of abandoning their play if birds and sheep are still awake. The poem is a demonstration of harmony between nature and human beings, including between young and old. It also returns to the theme of the nature of authority and leadership. The Nurse’s care does not repress or direct the children but allows them freedom to play. The “hills”, the “birds”, the “children”, the “laughter”, the “voices”, “the dews of night”, “the sun”, and “the sky” combined with the leaping and shouting of the children and the nurse’s motherly stillness produce an atmosphere of total and complete harmony between and among the different elements of nature thus mentally creating a paradise of harmonious existence.

This also holds true for “Chimney Sweeper” (Innocence) and little Tom Dacre’s liberation dream that moves us away from the physical world of adult harrowing and excruciating pain inflicted on children, to a spiritual realm of joy, happiness and harmony in the same light as the charity school children of “Holy Thursday”. The dream of Tom Dacre is a succinct example of the spiritual realm of essences characterised by the sense of joyous individuation. Tom’s dream brings joy and comfort, warmth and harmony. The Angel liberates Tom and his friends, “thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,” who were all “locked up in coffins of black;” by using a “bright key”. Once they are liberated, they take on their childlike innocence, transfigure into the image of the Lamb and are at one with everything else.

Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm. (15-24)

The landscape made up of the “green plain”, “the river”, “the Sun”, “the clouds”, and “the wind” represent a beautiful environment, the natural environment of childlike innocence therefore of Edenic and heavenly essences. The “Sun” in line 16 above is a pun that does not only refer to the sun, but also to the “Son” of God who himself is the light, Jesus Christ. That is why it is spelt with a capital “S” at the end of the verse line. Washing in the “river” could be likened to the baptismal Jordan where the human sin of the selfish fathers of the children is washed away before an encounter with God. Once this encounter becomes manifest, the children having been washed, leap, laugh, “rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind”. They are “naked and white”, symbols of innocence and purity. What this insinuates is that at innocence there is a subtle interconnectivity of things. God, man and the environment form a unity that is cosmic where there is universal joy. Such individuation brings all elements of nature together for a harmonious society free of all evil. This individuation, the poet insinuates, can only be attained when all are “Naked & white” or innocent and pure. In this state, man will “have God for his father & never want joy”. Tom’s dream is therefore a call for dutiful innocence which brings happiness and warmth.

The children in Tom’s dream are not different from those in “Holy Thursday” (Innocence) but for the fact that the “Holy Thursday” kids are a higher version of their “Chimney Sweeper” counterparts. Both sets of children live in the adult society but whereas the chimney sweeper kids are just in the process of transforming their adult parents and society and gaining consciousness of the necessity for innocence, the Holy Thursday kids have completely transformed theirs to the extent that the adults are in the realm of higher innocence. According to Fredrik Karlsson (2007) in *The Meeting of Childhood and Colonialism in Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience*:
In “Holy Thursday” 1 we get to see Blake’s own concern for children as well as him reflecting upon how society as a whole is proud to showcase how it takes care of its poor, but his emphasis is more on the purity of the children than on the muted criticism of the behaviour of their elders. (8)

Karlsson is right in that Blake’s primary interest in his poetry is not just to see and x-ray the physical but and more importantly, to provide a spiritual enlightenment to the physical depravity of the adult world. In “Holy Thursday” (Innocence), the place of worship of the children and the harmony found therein among the different species is once again brought to the fore and symbolises purity in individuation. The children’s “innocent faces”, the “grey-headed beadles”, “the wands as white as snow”, “the high dome of Paul’s”, “the Thames waters”, the song of the children compared to “harmonious thunderings” and the children themselves compared to “flowers of London town” and to “multitudes of lambs”, all come together to form a unity and harmony. Each of these individuals subtly merges into each other to express a universal joy in the cathedral.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the *Songs of Innocence* portray the playful world of children, the adoration of nature, the elevation of childhood innocence and in some cases, the depraved moral values of urban life as in the poem “London”. Yet, the poems are insightful and portray the concept of Romantic individuation which in the words of Carl Gustav Jung and as stated earlier is the process of self-realisation, the discovery and experience of meaning and purpose in life; the means by which one finds oneself and becomes who one really is, in total communion not only with oneself, but also with one’s environment, other species and with the transcendental reality. In other words, and as John Akwe Lambo (1982) intimates, the *Songs of Innocence* are viewed as the “unifying principle behind the visible frame of things”. (82).

Songs of Experience and Individualism

As opposed to the *Songs of Innocence*, the *Songs of Experience* portray man’s loss of innocence, his corrupt state, and his disregard not just for fellow man but also for the environment and other individual species therein.

Individualism, which is a self-centred feeling or conduct, egoism and disregard for the “other” in favour of the “self”, finds a suitable but deplorable manifestation in the *Songs of Experience*. Where collectivism and harmony characterise the *Songs of Innocence*, man’s corrupt state and his deviation from the natural order of things characterise the Songs of Experience. The warning of the Bard in “Introduction” (Experience), Earth’s answer in “Earth’s Answer”, the pathetic voice of the speaker in “Holy Thursday”, the dictatorship of the Nurse in “Nurse’s Song”, the metallic brain of the tiger in “The Tyger” and the hypocrisy and sheer wickedness of parents and “God and his Priest and King, / Who make up a heaven of our misery” (lines 11-12) in “The Chimney Sweeper” are examples of individualism.

Such individualism is characterised by hatred, wickedness, jealousy, self-conceitedness and other ills that forestall a collective and harmonious existence. The Bard in “Introduction” (Songs of Experience), as opposed to the Piper in the poem of Innocence, sounds a prophetic warning of the fate that awaits the universe because it has deviated from its state of natural piety to that of dangerous experience. The Bard knows the past, present and the future. He knows the value of individuation and the danger of individualism that have characterized the universe. As a prophet of God his “ears have heard, / The Holy Word, / That walk’d among the ancient trees” (3-5) and it is his duty as a kind of apostle to warn and help humanity, symbolized in the “Earth”, to return, to take a journey backwards to humanity’s natural state of felicity. The Bard warns:

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 watry shore
 Is giv'n thee till the break of day. (11-20)

The “O” and its repetition in the poem signals and fosters the pathetic situation in which Earth finds herself today as a result of individualism. Such individualism is characterized by a number of sins like jealousy, reason and hatred. These sins and ills have transformed humanity into a “lapsed Soul” (6). The Bard here refers to the soul after the Fall. Blake's perspective on this biblical teaching was that the soul falls into divided self-consciousness and into the division of the sexes. This fallen soul creates for itself a religious system that binds people in cruelty, jealousy and possessiveness. However, these are its own tendencies and it thus creates a God and a world in its own image. The light and dark symbolism, as well as that of falling and rising, indicates Blake's belief that the rebellious, “un-whole” fallen human nature could be rescued and restored. Currently, it inhabits a world of darkness, occupying an abject position in a constrained environment (bounded by the ‘floor’ and ‘shore’). The “Holy Word” is Christ, also referred to in the Bible as ‘the Word’, who discovers the disobedience of Adam in Eden. ‘The ancient trees’ evokes the image of the Garden of Eden. God is described as walking there, seeking his creation. After disobeying God's injunction not to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve hide among the trees because they now know they are naked (see *Genesis* 3:8-9). This imagery makes it clear that the poem is concerned with Blake's understanding of the Fall of humankind. It also lends to the poem and the voice of the bard all the resonances and authority of this biblical narrative.

Earth’s answer to the call in “Earth’s Answer” shows to what extent and degree man has deviated from the voice of, and directives from, God in the “ancient trees”, that is, the Garden of Eden. Earth acknowledges that she has been imprisoned by Reason and the “Selfish father of men” (the sins of Adam and Eve). She is chained in cold and darkness on the “watery shore,” the bounds of the materialistic world, which is mentioned in the “Introduction.”

The physical description of Earth is an indication of the profundity of the sin and the spiritual damage that have led to individualistic behaviour. In response to the Bard’s request, “Earth raised up her head / From the darkness dread and drear, / Her light fled, / Stony, dread, / And her locks covered with grey despair.” (Line 1-5). The darkness in which Earth is found is brooding. The “locks” that are covered with “grey despair” are symbols of Earth’s spiritual depravity. Cruelty, jealousy and selfishness also characterise the universe of the Earth. She is “Chained in night”. “Night” here refers to the sins of individualism.

Where these ills of individualism are present, light is absent. She therefore seeks daylight, arguing that the creative forces of life such as spring blossoms, the sower, and the “plowman”, can only bring life by daylight. She asks that the bard, or the reader, “break this heavy chain” that binds even “free Love.”

This same kind of self-conceitedness is poignant in “Holy Thursday” (Experience). As opposed to the poem of Innocence where there is a subtle interconnectivity between the different elements and species, the poem of experience sounds a pathetic note about human existence and attitude towards children, especially orphans. The poem is an indictment of the mistreatment of children from charity schools in England. The title of the poem itself is ironical. The speaker is suggesting that there is nothing holy in the ceremony by adults and for charity school children.

On the contrary, the Holy Thursday scene is occasion for the adults to inflict more pain on the orphans through the incitement of generous donations from the congregation. David Fairer (2002) in *Experience Reading Innocence: Contextualizing Blake's Holy Thursday* has carried out an in-depth study on the historical context of the Holy Thursday poems. He ascertains that:

The annual gathering of the London children exemplifies most spectacularly the fact that the singing of charity children in the eighteenth century was public and communal. In thousands of parish churches throughout the country, including individual London parishes like Islington, Kensington, Eastcheap, Deptford and Rotherhithe, the body of children from the local charity school was a familiar sight making its way to the weekly service, and once or twice a year on the occasion of the parish's charity sermon they were publicly on display for the purpose of raising money. They were also inevitably part of an ongoing debate about the function of charity in the community and the structure of society itself. (546)

Fairer insinuates that the children are not really washed and cleaned, uniformed, orderly and taken to church because they are loved. Rather, they are exploited by religious personalities and those who promote such schools. The poem reads:

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?
 It is a land of poverty!

 And their sun does never shine.
 And their fields are bleak & bare.
 And their ways are fill'd with thorns.
 It is eternal winter there.

 For where-e'er the sun does shine,
 And where-e'er the rain does fall:
 Babe can never hunger there,
 Nor poverty the mind appall.

There is a controlling irony in the title of the poem. The opening line makes clear the fact that there is no connection between the scene, as visualised in *Songs of Innocence*, and the idea of holiness. On the contrary, the speaker opines that the holiness of the day cannot be honoured when the scene represents an unholy situation. In other words, what we see in the poem is void of any holiness; rather it is hypocrisy from the adult.

The children are termed ‘babes’ twice in the poem. This informs and emphasises the fact that they are vulnerable and helpless. The adult forces such vulnerability and helplessness upon them. This explains why what is considered a song in Innocence is now viewed as a “trembling cry». «Trembling” is not only suggestive of the weak and quavering voice of the children but also of the fact that the children have cried out their tears.

The guardians of the children are depicted as “usurious”. Usurers take a high rate of interest on a loan. They take advantage of the poor. They lend them money and then squeeze them dry with cut-throat interest payment. Blake showcases his abhorrence for such exploitation of the most vulnerable. Suggestively, the guardians derive personal gain from their work, rather than being focused on delivering benefit.

It hints, too, at their involvement in a social system which, like usury, actually creates the poverty it claims to ease. Put differently, it is not only the guardians that make a heaven for themselves out of the misery of these orphans; it is the society at large. The consequence of this hypocrisy and individualistic tendencies is that the society has lost every productive potential, the land is “bleak and bare”, it is “eternal winter there”, “...their sun does never shine”, and the children are unhappy and poor. What Blake insinuates in “Holy Thursday” (Experience) is that individualism is a culture in the British society characterized by hypocrisy, usury, torture, wickedness and other such ills that create a society of orphans and deprive children of their parents and the playfulness that should generally characterize their existence.

As in “Holy Thursday” (Experience), the adult in “Nurse’s Song” (Experience) is a renegade and dictatorial nurse who does not compromise with the playful world of the children.

WHEN the voices of children are heard on the green
 And whisp’rings are in the dale,
 The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,
 My face turns green and pale.

Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down, 5
 And the dews of night arise;
 Your spring and your day are wasted in play,
 And your winter and night in disguise.

According to Andrew M. Spratt (2011) in *Innocence Lost: The Tension of Contrary States in Blake and Milton*, rather than laughing at the play of the children and being a part of it, the Nurse thinks of her own youth and becomes sick at the thought. This is either because the happiness of her youth stands in stark contrast to the horrors of her adult life, or because she realises only in retrospect that her youth was, in fact, a terrible time of life. Either way, she views the play of the children as something wasteful. Like Spratt opines:

By calling home the children, and not allowing them to continue to play as she did in Innocence, the Nurse forces reality upon the children. The Nurse, along with the old people in “The Echoing Green”, seems to predict the future unhappiness of the children. The impression of the evanescence of innocence, and the prediction of its loss, along with the concept that sorrow is more full when contrasted with joy, suggest a strong thematic link between Paradise Lost and Blake’s poetry (21-22)

While the Nurse may well force reality on the children, the one thing certain is that she is selfish, renegade and spiritually corrupt. She does not care about the world of the children characterised by play. What matters here is her personal interest that does not take into consideration the aspirations of the children. As opposed to the Nurse of innocence who shares a sentimental affinity with the children and participates in their joviality and jocund company, the Nurse of Experience is jealous and dangerous. Her word is her bone. She is not open to conversation and communication. She does not allow the children to express themselves, as is the case in Innocence. The children thus have no option than quickly obey the injunctions of the Nurse. This makes the Nurse undemocratic, dictatorial and individualistic. The brevity of the poem informs her stoic nature.

The individualism of the Nurse (Experience) and her inability to understand the world of children and their innocence likens her to the parents and adults in “Chimney Sweeper” (Experience). According to Abdel Elah Al-Nehar (2007)

The state of Innocence is selfless and desires to please "All." It represents the spontaneous happiness of childhood. Truly, nothing in the world of emotion is lighter than the happiness of a child. This innocence, possessed by each of us in childhood or fantasy, is a kind of proof that we do possess the powerful, creative, and "Divine Imagination". Experience, on the other hand, is blighted innocence. It is an analytic state of mind that finds the limits of the world that the human's fallen perception gives him". It is selfish and has a devouring character which seeks to please only itself. (33)

The state of experience is the world of the adult who unlike the childhood state of innocence is individualistic and is “selfish” with a character that is “devouring” and “seeks to please only itself”. The individualism of “God and his Priest and King,” (line 11) does not allow them have consideration for the others, here represented by the chimney sweeper kids.

“The Chimney Sweeper” is one of Blake’s poems of social protest and indictment of adult individualism. It brings to the fore the selfishness, wickedness, unconsciousness and other ills of adults committed against children. George Norton (2014) ascertains that the sweeps are not only innocent victims of the cruellest exploitation “but they are associated with the smoke of industrialisation, thus uniting two central Romantic preoccupations: childhood; and the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the natural world”.

Nine of the 12 lines of the poem are spoken by the sweep but the poem begins with another speaker who spies “A little black thing among the snow”. The colour palette here is distinctly monochrome with none of the brightness and green of Tom’s dream in the *Innocence* poem. The use of “thing” to refer to the sweep is a depersonalization that speaks volumes of the mistreatment of the children and the selfishness of the adults.

The poem is set in winter and whereas the sweeps in Tom’s dream are ‘naked’, free of the clothing which in Blake often symbolises social convention or restriction, the speaker here wears “the clothes of death” and sings “the notes of woe” (unlike the laughing in the dream). The child’s answers to the question asked are the most pathetic responses about the hypocrisy and wickedness of adults towards children. Unlike the boys in the *Innocence* poem, he understands his oppression, knows his oppressors and the justification for their heinous deed of slavery:

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.

The “notes of woe” are not only onomatopoeically represented in “weep, weep, weep”, but also in the punning use of the word which also means “to cry” or to shed tears. The child’s apparent happiness is the reason why he is sold. This makes the adult an individualistic sadist. Having forced their son into enslavement, teaching him to sing ‘the notes of woe’, the parents then head to church to praise ‘God and his priest and king’, who, the boy tells us, ‘make up a heaven of our misery’. The speaker’s parents collude with Church and State, actively constructing a heaven out of the misery of others, or, as Nicholas Marsh (2001) argues, ‘they “make up” a heaven where, in fact, there is “misery” (115).

The poems of experience therefore explore individualistic tendencies in a universe of experience, wickedness, tyranny, oppression, corruption and hatred as opposed to the poems of Innocence that create a harmonious universe by virtue of man’s compassionate behaviour and innocence. We have seen this in *Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience*, where individuation characterises the poems of innocence and individualism, the poems of experience. One fundamental question remains unanswered namely; what is Blake’s poetic vision? Put differently, what is the message Blake sends through in his poetry? This vision is what we call “Romantic Thingliness”.

Romantic Thingliness: Blake’s Visionary Insights

In *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, Blake writes “I must create a system, or be enslaved by another man’s. I will not reason and compare: my business is to create.” What he insinuates here is that, as a nonconformist, his goal is to create a system by which he can live and not live by the dictates of other systems. His goal therefore is to create a world that he wants to live in, establish rules that he wants to follow and put in place a system he thinks is fair. Briefly, his mission is to create a universe of harmonious beings, a universe not of individualism but of individuation.

This perhaps explains why he infused his own individualism into pieces that would speak to his listeners as well as to those wanting to pull away from the worn path. The worn path here is man’s derailment from the natural order of things as at creation and his embrace of ills that impeded a harmonious coexistence. Blake embedded his thought into both his poetry and his art. While he did depict the darker side of the Romantics, he, nonetheless, depicted true Romantic vision through the idealisation of the individual by using nature, the imagination and the shunning of corrupt evil attitudes for such idealisation.

“Introduction” (Experience) is one of those poems where Blake calls on the Universe to take a backward journey to a state of innocence and individuation, as is the case in “Introduction” (Innocence). “Introduction” (Innocence) is actually the genesis and foundation of Blake’s philosophical vision of what the universe ought to be as created at the beginning in the book of *Genesis*. As earlier stated, the Child from the cloud is God who brings the Good News to the prophet symbolised in the Piper. The Piper is the messenger sent by God to tell the world about Christ (Lamb) and the necessity of following in His footsteps.

The Piper then pipes “a song about a Lamb” and writes it “down in a book, that all may read”. This book is the *Holy Bible* that teaches Christians about the need for harmonious coexistence, brotherly love, peace, unity, innocence and all other imaginable virtues. All other ensuing poems of innocence speak of the harmony in the cosmos, the interdependence of things, and emphasise the microcosm-macrocosm aspects of life whereby the animate and the inanimate, the finite and the infinite, the organic and the inorganic, the material and the immaterial, the fauna and the flora form a chain of Being, thus individuation.

In the *Songs of Experience* man has lost the earthly paradise of Innocence. He has changed from Lamb to Tiger; he has become an abstraction in his human form. His existence is characterised by individualistic behaviours of hatred, wickedness, dictatorship, jealousy, avarice, egocentrism and several other ills that have far taken him away from his state of felicity and absolute goodness. The Bard in “Introduction” (Experience) expresses this.

He is a kind of Prophet “Who Present, Past, & Future sees / Whose ears have heard, / The Holy Word, / That walk'd among the ancient trees” (2-5). The warning of the Bard is to engage man (Earth) on a journey back to his natural state of individuation or “Thingliness”. In a pathetic and compassionate tone, the Bard calls out; “O Earth O Earth return! / Arise from out the dewy grass;” (11-12), “Rise(s) from the slumberous mass”. (15), “Turn away no more;”(16) Earth or humanity must go back to the origin of things as at the beginning of time in *Genesis*.

Conclusion

Blake’s Romantic vision can thus be summed up in what M.H Abrams calls the “therapeutic drive”. It is, as stated by Ngide (2018), one that sees the universe as a unified mechanism. It is a vision, like that of Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Wordsworth, which underscores the need for change or mutation in a universe that is corrupt and perverted by human artifice in both the social and political domains. Through mutation, the world becomes a paradise and everything is united with every other thing in a fusion that is infinite. This subtle intermingling of the different elements of Nature is what Plato and Plotinus, founders of Neo-Platonism, call “The World Soul”.(2) This world soul is also called the *Anima Mundi* which is present in all things and animates and unites the entire universe.

Blake was certainly acquainted with this Platonic or Neo-Platonic conception of the World Soul. Platonism holds that God, the “Supreme monad” who established order and harmony as in *Genesis*, creates this World Soul. For Blake, as for other Romantics, the universe is an original harmony and unity, not a composition of elements. The apparent differentiations in things are no more than particularizations of what is originally homogeneous, one, indivisible, and continuous. This is what Hugh refers to as the “One Mind” achieved through what he calls “the therapeutic” (50) drive which is “an attempt to ‘heal’ the division between mind and world, subject and object, citizen and state, that the radical enlightenment had forced open” (50). Blake’s Romantic philosophy is, therefore, one of reconciliation, or synthesis of whatever is divided, opposed and conflicting. He has achieved this reunion of the many into the One and confirms, as Pope (2010) does with telling finality in *Essay on Man*, “All discord” is “harmony not understood”.

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