Perspectives

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Romantic, Victorian, and Modern Literature

Jalal Uddin Khan

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Perspectives: Romantic, Victorian, and Modern Literature

By Jalal Uddin Khan

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To the fond and precious memory of my eldest brother
(who gave me non-traditional boyhood lessons in English
and made them fun)

and

To my lovely SSWN

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PREFACE

Educated in Bangladesh (where he received a first class honors from Jahangirnagar University) and the USA (where he attended The American University, Washington, D. C. on a Fulbright scholarship before he moved on to New York University to complete his PhD), Jalal Uddin Khan has had a productive publishing and administrative career. He has taught at IIU Malaysia (where he served for a time as director of the university press and editor of a now-inactive journal for many years) and the University of Qatar, and is at present teaching at the University of Nizwa, Oman, where he was a past Department Head. Throughout his career, Jalal Khan has participated in, as he writes, a "fostering of mutual understanding between the Oriental and the Western." The present volume reflects this important endeavor, as does, perhaps to an even greater degree, the companion volume—*Readings in Oriental Literature: Arabian, Indian, and Islamic*—also published this year by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

I first came to know Jalal Khan as a doctoral student in the Department of English, New York University, where my late colleague, Paul Magnuson, served as director of his 1994 doctoral thesis, "The Political Conservatism of William Wordsworth and His Post-Waterloo Poetry (1815-1820)" and I served as a reader. Instead of marginalizing the poetry of these years, a common practice in Wordsworth studies, Dr. Khan argued its intrinsic interest, both aesthetic and ideological, in light of Burkean conservatism. He demonstrated how much of this poetry, which frequently re-engages the interests and values of the earlier nature poetry, is implicitly political. Many articles drawn from the dissertation have appeared in Western journals such as *Modern Language Studies*, *Forum for Modern Language Studies, Studies in Philology, English Language Notes, Essays in Arts and Sciences, The Critical Review* (currently inactive), and *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies.*

These articles do not reappear in the present volume, which is instead Dr. Khan's organization and revision of published articles that have appeared mostly in Eastern journals, notably including *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (American University of Cairo). Western readers of the essays in the present volume might keep in mind their original audience. In republishing them here, Khan is not so much interested in polemical or revisionary readings of selected British literary texts—Romantic, Victorian, and Modern—as he is in conveying an increased mutual understanding of East and West in these texts with respect to key issues—political, aesthetic, historical, cultural, ethical, and biographical.

Khan navigates these issues with reference to a considerable amount of modern to contemporary scholarship and critique, mostly but not exclusively Western. Two scholar-critics provide the crucial heuristics for his line of inquiry: principally Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and, to a lesser extent, Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1984). Said's foundational study, in one sense, describes the very lack of understanding of the East by the West that Dr. Khan addresses. Although such was not Said's intent, "Orientalism" has become a term of opprobrium within postcolonial studies, chiefly denoting the self-justifying stereotypes by means of which a colonizing West perpetuates its hegemony. While acknowledging its continued relevance, Dr. Khan joins other critics in finding Said's study too monolithic in its pronouncements, viewing the West as well as East through too single-minded a lens and implying a stereotypic myopia by the West for which there are significant exceptions. The most notable exception is Sir William Jones (1747-94, duly acknowledged early on by Said), who, though in the employment of the East India Company, uncovered the intertwining roots of the Indo-European family of languages—one of the greatest linguistic discoveries ever—and translated into English a considerable amount of Indian poetry from the Sanskrit that, as Dr. Khan demonstrates, much influenced Percy Shelley, among other British and Continental writers. "Romantic Orientalism," unlike the more stereotypic Victorian Orientalism that would follow, is strong counter-evidence to any reductive tendency in Said's study, which, to be sure, Said himself attempted to guard against. Khan joins other scholars, such as Raymond Schwab, De Sola Pinto, and Nigel Leask,

in arguing that Romantic Orientalists, "be they travelers or diplomats or merchants or missionaries, instead of misrepresenting in a racially motivated strategy, were in fact truthful to their experience and what they saw." Jones is simply the most important of a number of European writers of the Romantic era who did not fall back on Oriental stereotypes. Citing a number of specific works by Jones, which we know Shelley read, Khan argues an Indic influence on works from *Queen Mab* to *Alastor* to *Prometheus Unbound*. They are "all internalized versions of the drama of cultural encounter taking place within the realm of the dream . . ." I would suggest that Khan's closely researched essay, "Shelley's Orientalia: Indian Elements in His Poetry," be read first in this collection as affording the most comprehensive illustration of his larger intent as critic-scholar.

By contrast with the Romantics, major Victorian writers from James Mill to Tennyson to Ruskin do fall into the trap of Orientalism in its stereotypic sense. More than their predecessors, they see the British colonization of India in the best interests of both parties and a cultural hegemony to be perpetuated. What James Mill has to say about Indian culture, less nuanced than the dubious views of Tennyson and Ruskin, makes for painful reading, amply cited by Khan. For example, both India and China are "tainted with the vices of insincerity; dissembling, treacherous, mendacious, to any excess, which surpasses even the unusual measure of uncultivated society . . . Both are in a physical sense disgustingly unclean in their persons and houses." In seeing Indian poverty the direct consequence of indigenous authoritarian rule, Mill is making an argument for political liberalism at home, but he does so by means of portraying Indian society as the absolute "other" of which Said complains with respect to the West's perception of Arab cultures.

In approaching Romantic literary texts Khan keeps in mind Jerome McGann's argument in *The Romantic Ideology* that a critique of such texts should not recapitulate the very evaluative apparatuses that the Romantics themselves employ. Chief among these is the notion of the solitary genius who, by dint of the deific faculty of imagination, creates works largely dissociated from the historical and cultural forces that surround them. Said himself was influenced by Michel Foucault, cited prominently in the early pages of *Orientalism*, as was Stephen Greenblatt, who first used the term "new historicism"

in making a case for a new "cultural poetics." Khan approaches Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" from what he terms a new historicist perspective, in contrast to one that would emphasize the solitary Coleridge looking into the contents of his own dream world. Though to some degree Khan's investigation entails the kind of source study one finds in John Livingston Lowes's *The Road to Xanadu* (1927), Khan cites literary and cultural sources that lead to interpretive possibilities, whereas Lowes spoke of how such sources melted together in a kind of poetical cauldron, the poet's fierce private imagination. Khan discusses five such interpretive perspectives: the personal, the scientific, the political, the Orientalist, and the Euro-American. With respect to the scientific, he invokes such figures as James Hutton, Erasmus Darwin, and Sir Humphry Davy; with respect to the political, the most provocative single source is Napoleon himself, perhaps the double of Kubla Khan. As in Shelley's "Ozymandias," "Kubla Khan," with its ancestral voices prophesying war, may be read as a warning, echoing Volney among others, of the fate of empire, whether one considers the fate of the Chinese potentate, Napoleon, or the French Revolution as a whole. With respect to the Euro-American, Khan reminds us of Coleridge's aborted utopian scheme, Pantisocracy, to be founded on the banks of the Susquehanna, and the vulnerability of all pleasure palaces.

His essays on Modern literature begin with three on Yeats and end with one on the Spanish Civil War. The latter contrasts the different perspectives of Malraux, Orwell, and Hemingway, and provides a succinct account of how the triumph of Franco was less the consequence of his own military and political adroitness than the sad falling out among factions on the Left. Khan's triple comparison narrates key perspectives on the war. In his novel *Man's Fate* Malraux underscores the need for the Loyalists to forego individual bravery and anarchistic idealism on behalf of the concerted and unified effort of Communist command to combat Fascism, but that this requires a "tragic dialectic," as Joseph Frank puts it, "between means and ends inherent in all organized political violence—and even when such violence is a necessary and legitimate self-defense of liberty, justice, and human dignity." Orwell arrived in Spain not fully aware of what politically was going on; in his memoir *Homage to Catalonia* he describes his growing awareness of the tragic splintering

of the Loyalist cause—especially between the Anarchists and the Communists—that would undermine the Loyalists. And Hemingway, arriving midway into the conflict, was intensely anti-Fascist but, confronted with fully five different political factions on the Left, remained in other respects politically uncommitted. In his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* he depicts in the protagonist Jordan somebody who sees the ultimate value of resistance to Fascism even when he is personally doomed. In this discussion, Khan is speaking not as an historicist with a methodological agenda but as a literary historian engaged in a clarifying reconstruction of how three major writers negotiated one of the greatest political calamities of the twentieth century.

As a literary biographer myself, I note that Khan, a flexible critic and scholar, frequently puts aside an historicist agenda in favor of other approaches, from formalist to biographical, depending on the topic and writer at hand. Although he insists on a divide between biographical exposition and the values and meanings of works of art and literature in themselves, he engages in a considerable amount of biographical exposition, as in the chapters on Byron, Keats, and Yeats. Of Byron's poetry he writes that it is "an expression of the characteristic traits of his personality—rebellious, boastful, reckless, averse, dismissive, misanthropic, overreaching, cynical, ironic, and egotistical . . ." His close reading of *Manfred* begins with a genetic account of when, where, and how it came to be written, since the circumstances of its composition are, as he says, "significant." Furthermore, "The element of incest in *Manfred* may be taken as Byron's veiled confession of his relationship with Augusta," his half-sister, though Khan points out the pervasiveness of incest as a theme throughout the literature of the Romantic era. "Yet the character of Manfred is unique in the sense that it combines literary and autobiographical elements with those of heroic defiance and single-minded independence." Khan reminds us that Nietzsche held *Manfred* in higher esteem than he held *Faust*.

In his chapter on Keats's earlier poetry, Khan gives a developmental account of the poetry, noting both the circumstances of composition—his journeys into the environs of London, for example—and the many literary influences that the poet would gradually "transmute into his own idiom." To be sure, this is not the

"lone genius" the New Historicists question—and Keats is, as Khan points out, the most "social" of the Romantic poets—but at the same time Keats identifies with and is enchanted by his predecessor Chatterton, the lone and neglected genius *par excellence* who also served as a warning, as he did to Wordsworth, of the perils of isolation. Khan also takes up the early political poems with reference to their genesis in current events, where history and autobiography become one.

In his chapter on "Ode to a Nightingale," Khan largely forsakes an historicist approach for intertextual and psychogenic ones, the first focusing on complex relationships among contemporaries Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley but looking ahead to Frost, the second on Bloomian issues concerning the anxiety of influence. With respect to intertextuality, I think his principal contribution is the suggestion that Sir William Jones's *Hymn to Narayana*, which celebrates the Indian creation myth, is behind Keats's much anthropomorphized Nightingale, who "singest of summer in full-throated ease." He also notes the probable influence of Charlotte Smith's three elegiac sonnets about the equally anthropomorphized nightingale (as he does that of Isabella Lickbarrow on Keats's Chapman's Homer sonnet).

Of the three chapters devoted to Yeats, one is largely a biographical narrative of Yeats and Maude Gonne's intense but never consummated relationship, which endured over many years despite fundamental conflicts in their political views; the other, on the great poem "Easter 1916," entails both an historical description of events leading up to the Easter Rebellion, a biographical accounting of Yeats's own relationships with key figures in the rebellion as well as, once again, his personal relationship with Maude Gonne. Without this biographical and historical information, many insights into this poem offered by Khan and into other poems such as "Adam's Curse," "The Second Coming," "A Prayer for my Daughter," and the Crazy Jane poems, would be inaccessible. To my mind a welcome residue of "Romantic ideology" is found even in the title of his opening essay, according to the chronological ordering of the volume, "The Road Not Taken: A View of William Blake's Originality."

Perspectives: Romantic, Victorian, and Modern Literature is, as "perspectives" implies, expressive of its author's ultimate pluralism with regard to method and to the particular texts enjoined. Its unity as

a collection of essays is not to be found in a single overriding thesis or a continuity in the works discussed but in the literary sensibility of Jalal Khan himself—his high regard for literature as a means of ethical inquiry and enhancement, and his scholarly and critical breadth of literary engagement.

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November 15, 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most of the essays in this book (as well as the other, *Readings in Oriental Literature: Arabian, Indian, and Islamic*, by the same publisher) were originally published in different venues over the last decade or so. All the essays have been extensively revised for the purpose of bringing them together in these two books. In most cases the difference between the original and the present versions is one-third to double or, as in the case of a few, even two-thirds, so that the revisions actually reflect a growth and evolution of my ideas (not really a change of my views). In this sense, the two books are significantly different from a mere collection of my previously published materials. In fact, my intention of putting together a selection of them (twenty-five articles out of over forty) in the form of these two books arose from my pressing urge that I had thought I had something fundamentally new and fresh to add to and augment my earlier readings. I am thankful that all the academic outlets – duly acknowledged at the outset of each essay -- in which the essays originally appeared in their shorter form have gladly extended their permission to reproduce the essays stating that they (the journals) would be rather happy to see them mentioned in my other publications.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the following individuals for their kind help and cooperation rendered in various ways, from technical to academic, in preparing and formatting the two manuscripts. My very first mention goes to Professor Nancy K. Nanney, a past Chair of the Humanities Division, West Virginia University at Parkersburg. A graduate of the University of Hawaii with a background in modern dramatic literature and culture, Dr Nanney was always willing to carefully read with interest and acumen whatever academic and professional materials I shared with her every now and then. I always benefited from her critical comments and insightful corrections. Her kind words that my work

would attract a broad international readership were very encouraging, lifting my spirits high.

I wish to acknowledge with my highest regard and appreciation Professor Laurence Lockridge of English at New York University, New York. An established and well-known Harvard-educated Romanticist with his scholarly studies in the field, Dr Lockridge was always helpful whenever I approached him with my academic needs and queries, generously praising my work as fascinating and wide-ranging. I am truly honored that he has kindly agreed to read and write a fine and penetrating preface to this *Perspectives* book, although he thought, probably as a compliment, the above-mentioned *Oriental* volume was an expression of what could be "strange seas of thought" to many readers and as such might attract more attention. It is to be mentioned that there are four essays—those on Shelley, Coleridge and the Victorian Reaction to British India—which find their way into both volumes.

I owe a very special indebtedness to Dr John Wallen, Professor of English at the University of Nizwa, Oman, who is also editor of the mostly Western-contributed online quarterly journal *The Victorian*. He deserves many hearty thanks with plenty of deep gratitude for being an immensely handy and highly valuable asset to patiently and carefully go through the individual essays that comprise the entire material of the present book. That he wrote a beautiful foreword to my *Oriental* volume has greatly obliged me and has given a lasting form to our collegial and cordial relationship. A Royal Holloway (University of London)-trained Richard Burton scholar, Dr Wallen's (Victorian) specialism overlaps mine (Romanticism); his research interests border and intersect mine, making him the right person, well-read and well-published as he is, to seek a second opinion from, when necessary, in putting together the contents of that volume.

I cannot but be happy and proud to thank Professor M.A.R. Habib for his revealing comments on some of my writings he kindly made time to read. An expert on T. S. Eliot and modern literary theory with numerous critical as well as creative volumes to his credit, Dr Habib, a British-American scholar of Oxford background, teaches at Rutgers University, New Jersey. I am indebted to him for his remarkably articulated statements endorsing my books. I must thankfully mention Dr Syed Bashir Ahmed, who teaches English and

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Once again, thanks go to all those journals in different countries (India, Egypt, Spain, Turkey, Taiwan, Malaysia, England, USA, Australia, and Bangladesh) in which most of the essays first appeared in their original versions and which, noted at the beginning of each essay, have kindly granted their permission to have the materials, now significantly revised and updated, reprinted in these two books. On the other hand, among my readings, I should particularly mention the highly useful Houston-based bimonthly *Saudi Aramco World*, which I have been receiving gratis (as all subscribers do) since 1999 and to which I am greatly indebted for the interdisciplinary (historical, cultural and literary) knowledge I have acquired, with great delight and satisfaction, from its beautifully printed (glossy and illustrated) pages since.

Before I conclude, I can by no means let my debt to my two great friends go unacknowledged and unrecognized. One of them is Zoglul Hussein, a UK-based former computer consultant, who gave up his academic and professional ambitions to organize the struggle for the freedom of Bangladesh in Kolkata in 1971. In addition to being an activist and organizer, he is currently doing freelance writings on the historical and political scene of the country of his origin. The other is Col. (Retd.) R. Chowdhury, also a former freedom fighter of Bangladesh, now living a retired life in the USA and frequently writing essays, under the pseudonym of “Obaid Chowdhury,” on the social and political issues of the original native country he valiantly fought for forty-four years ago. Both are men of great integrity,

patriotic fervor and personal sacrifice. Both believe that the country of their contribution continues to slide backward, especially with respect to the ideals of freedom, democracy, patriotism and nationalism, particularly under the present Awami government. Both have an excellent and splendid, perhaps unbeatable command of English in their possession. While one kindly checked a large portion of my two books for slips through word file editor, the other was nice to make time to review a chapter of general interest and make useful comments that helped me to improve it. It is my pleasure to give a lasting form to the memory of my politically well-informed and like-minded friends.

Finally, I am glad to express my warm thanks to my family—my wife and our three wonderful children, SSW—who were always supportive of my hard work and scholarly pursuits even if that meant me being away from home in Toronto to teach abroad in the Middle East and leaving them alone to do the routine drudgery of the household, to be punctuated, however, by whatever exciting North American attractions, opportunities and challenges they could avail themselves of as the three amazing kids were and are still going through the different stages of their school and college education with occasional yet serious “teen” excursions of their own into the realms of literature as part of their course of study.

Jalal Uddin Khan
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November 30, 2014

PART 1:

ROMANTIC

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN: A VIEW OF WILLIAM BLAKE'S ORIGINALITY[1]

Argument: Like Robert Frost in his supposedly most popular poem, William Blake also took the road "less travelled by," uncommon and untraditional, both in their own ways, Blake's being the most extreme. That is where his originality lies. The two poets are also poles apart in their total and ultimate vision and philosophy. Unlike Frost, who is realistic, conventional, moralistic, humanitarian, practically wise, earthy, and earthbound, Blake is a remote and far-reaching Romantic visionary, radically spiritual and daringly unconventional, revising, rewriting and revolutionizing everything in existence that he finds limiting, mechanical, and constricting. From organized society, traditional morality and political establishment to material philosophy, biblical creation and institutionalized religion, his reinterpretation of all these is so unorthodox that he created his own mythological apparatus to convey his bold and blasphemous prophecies, all, however, with an impossibly futuristic and utopian bent of mind informed by a uniquely mythic vision of reality.

> Two roads diverged in a [yellow] wood, and I—
> I took the one less travelled by,
> And that has made all the difference.
> "The Road Not Taken" (Robert Frost)

> "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." —William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1.5.167–8)

> "Alas, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have dreamed. And especially above the heavens: for all gods are poets' parables, poets' prevarications. Verily, it always lifts us higher - specifically, to the realm of the clouds: upon these we

> place our motley bastards and call them gods and overmen. For they are just light enough for these chairs … Ah, how weary I am of poets! —Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885). Part II, Chapter 39, "On Poets"

William Blake (1757–1827) was one of the first and major English Romantic poets to launch Enlightenment and/or Romantic liberalism in Western thought that could only be conceived through and defined by imaginative quest and transcendence. Such was the depth and breadth of his complexly new concepts that he was also regarded as one of the most original minds in the history of the West. According to Northrop Frye, whose *Fearful Symmetry* in its mythopoeic approach significantly transformed the Blake studies, Blake belongs to

> the great cosmopolitan humanist culture which arose in Europe between the Renaissance and the Reformation [and which] had a dislike of the scholastic philosophy in which religion had got itself entangled, and [which] upheld … imaginative interpretation against argument, the visions of Plato against the logic of Aristotle, the Word of God against the reason of man.[2]

To put more of a contextual perspective on Frye's observation, Blake belonged to the Western liberal tradition of tolerance in mind-illuminating intellectual thinking that began with Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, and the Stoics and continued through the Renaissance humanism of those mentioned by Frye as well as the German Christian mystic Jakob Bohme and the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno. As a Romantic visionary, Blake could also trace some of his roots to the seventeenth century continental rationalism of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, who based their philosophy on human reason, immortality of the soul, innate ideas of the mind and the faith in the existence of God. While Blake shared the general spirit of liberalism with the early-to-mid eighteenth century British empiricist scientists and philosophers—Isaac Newton, John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume, he revolted against their mechanical empiricism that stressed the matter over the mind as they argued for the primacy of the human senses and sensory experience.[3] He disagreed with their materialist bias that knowledge mainly derived from sense perceptions, feelings, and sentiments, as opposed to the belief of the

rationalists in the workings of the reasoning mind that had finally come to conclude with the notion of a religious or spiritual faith in God. Empiricists, however, were not very consistent in their empiricism, so they could not categorically rule out the argument for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul; in fact, some of them, for example, Locke, was of the opinion that faith in God and certain moral norms were inherent in human reason, which was also at the heart of the immediately following French (Age of Reason) Enlightenment highly influential as far as English/German Romanticisms were concerned.

Blake and his fellow Romantics were in fact more in line with the thinkers of this mid-to-late eighteenth century French Enlightenment. They were (in fairly chronological order): Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Condorcet, Marie Olympe, and Madame de Stael, who all campaigned for "enlightened" humanity, reason and rationalism, (feeling as well), opposition to authority, return to nature, children and childhood, human rights and the rights of women, abolition of slavery and censorship, freedom of the press and the individual, and natural right and natural religion. Like the other English Romantic poets, Blake also had a great spiritual affinity with the German poets, artists, musicians, philosophers, and astronomers of the same period such as (in fairly chronological order) Beethoven, Immanuel Kant, Herder, Martin Wieland, (later English) William Herschel, Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Hegel, Schelling, Novalis, and the Brothers Grimm, all of whom in varying degrees and with the differences of their own balanced and reconciled the dualities of rationalism and empiricism, body and mind, mind and matter, dream/illusion and reality, natural and supernatural, and reason and sensory impressions. They found correlation between art and folk/popular culture, human and nature, national/local and universal, dynamic view of historical continuity and evolution, and static view of historical change. Kant in his "cool intellectualism," for example, claimed that both the law of causality/causal relations and the law of morals/ethics were equally absolute and universal. He confirmed that it was essential to believe in the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and the free will as he also stressed the importance of feeling, imagination, experience, yearning, independence, freedom, and individual ego—all to avoid being tied to any fixed set of thoughts or

concepts—internal or external—which led, after Kant and Schiller, to the Romantic celebration of artistic genius and of the artist creating his own reality like God.[4]

While Kant established the importance of the relationship between what was being observed and who was observing, the same thing having different meanings to different viewers (for instance, the way Blake looks at a rose, a tiger, or London or the way Herschel adjusted his telescope in Windsor in 1781 to see the stars in the "fathomless" sky, which he compared to a "luxuriant garden," after Erasmus Darwin), Hegel through his dialectical method reconciled the opposing arguments in an ideal synthesis. Both of them were thus highly influential to or of the same Romantic temper as the individualist, imaginative, and autobiographical English Romantics, who viewed all nature—animate or inanimate—as imbued with the living spirit of one Absolute, which Schelling called "world soul" or "world spirit"—something like the Wordsworthian pantheism. For the Romantics, the entire physical world together with human knowledge, philosophy, and poetry, formed a great positive synthesis and everything, be it a plant, a flower, a poem, a rock, a language, or a nation, was like a living organism constantly evolving and unfolding. In their own way the Romantics through the faculty of imagination rose above the confines of the rationalist reason and empiricist sense to find an organic reconciliation of the opposites such as heaven and hell or the two contrary states of the human soul like innocence and experience or any other conflicting or discordant qualities as both Blake and Coleridge understood them. Both the German and the English Romantics unequivocally shared the Kantian notion of the aesthetic experience of the beauty of art in itself—"das Ding an sich"—further developed by Schiller and their longing for nature and nature's mysteries, the distant Middle Ages, the mystic Orient, old ruins, the uncanny and the supernatural.

As a poet-prophet, a visual artist, and a social and political critic of his times, Blake attracted a number of critical approaches in recent times—Marxist, psychoanalytic, feminist, New Critical, and deconstructionist—all of which ultimately found him as one of the original geniuses in English art and poetry. Recently, in the wake of a resurgent historicism, there has been an ongoing effort to restore politics and history to the center of Blake studies—a shift from the

"apolitical Blake of mentalist and deconstructionalist criticism toward the revolutionary artist celebrated in Peter Ackroyd's biography and Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man*."[5] Living during a time of intense social change marked by the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution, Blake was a profoundly stirring poet, a key figure in launching the Romantic movement in English poetry. Called the "Columbus of the psyche" for his introspective insights into the human mind, he created his own private mythology to describe what he discovered during his imaginative and spiritual voyages.

Blake's style, which may be described as "manic," is not totally out of tune with the radical visionary and prophetic writings of the Ranters and Levellers, and Swift and Smart.[6] Although he may have much in common with his radical Protestant predecessors, his spiritual and visionary interpretation of the biblical prophecies is even more radical. His bold experiments with new forms and techniques and his compressed symbolism show his originality in poetry. As Abrams and Stillinger put it, "Blake was a born ironist who enjoyed mystifying his well-meaning but literal-minded friends and who took a defiant pleasure in shocking the dull and complacent angels of his day by being deliberately outrageous in representing his work and opinions."[7] His "rose" is not the "red rose" of Robert Burns, whose description of love in terms of a rose ("O my luve's like a red, red rose") opened a new and fresh treatment of the subject. Nor is it the "sweet rose" of George Herbert, who emphasizes the permanence of a "virtuous soul" as compared with the transience of a rose, whose color, metaphysically described by the poet as "angry and brave, /Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye." Blake's is the "sick" rose doomed to suffer from the "dark secret love" of the "invisible worm" lurking in its bed. His "pretty rose tree," instead of being "pretty," can actually be an embodiment of jealousy offering the speaker only thorns in return for his loving attentions.

Similarly, Blake's pipers and sunflowers, Toms and Lycas, tigers and stars continue to strike us with a sense of poetic as well as prophetic unconventionality. His originality lies in his notoriously unconventional treatment of the traditional political and religious themes in a variety of creative arts: poetry, prose, prophecies, designs and engravings illustrating his own works and testifying to the

peculiar versatility of his genius. The self-illustrated plates or texts of his writings, with their "fourfold visionary aesthetics," as pointed out by Klonsky, directly place him in the Renaissance tradition of picture-poetry or Emblem poetry, which had been based on a "unified mystical world-view," displaced by Newtonian science and the rationalist/dualist philosophy of Locke and Descartes.[8]

Although there is a disagreement among the Blake scholars over whether he was a mystic or a visionary, he, regardless, experienced direct apprehensions of God:

> I am in God's presence night and day,
> And he never turns his face away. ("I Rose Up at the Dawn of Day")

His original and radical thinking was responsible for his iconoclastic re-reading of ancient classical culture and literature; his unorthodox and cabbalistic reinterpretation of the Bible; his revolutionary ideas about class and gender; and his doctrines of the two contrary states of the human mind. He was against all kinds of externally imposed or created systems, political or religious, which he thought were enslaving and abstracting "mental deities from their objects." He reconciled his role as a prophet of times to come with his role as a social critic of his own time. He was an unorthodox in his moral and religious beliefs as he was a radical in his political views. He believed in revolutionary means to end all forms of tyranny and oppression to achieve political freedom and equality. This historical change was to be effected simultaneously with what was even more important—a radical change in the moral and spiritual condition of the individual mind in the direction of the all-inclusive primal state of being before the fall. The restoration of the spiritual unity of vision was to be taking place by a process of liberating the bodily desires through "sensual enjoyment," which, he believed, was instrumental in acquiring "enlarged and numerous senses" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, henceforth *MHH*), ultimately leading to the apocalyptic redemption. Such a process would mark a return to the original (now lost) mode of undivided vision. In other words, humanity is to regain or at least approximate the pre-fall Edenic state of existence as it works its way back through the *three* successively lower states of being in the fallen world:

> Beulah (a pastoral condition of easy and relaxed innocence, without clash of "contraries"), Generation (the realm of common human experience, suffering, and conflicting contraries), and Ulro (Blake's hell, the lowest state, or limit, of bleak rationality, tyranny, static negation, and isolated Selfhood).[9]

The three worlds (or the three levels to one world) in which one could live are, therefore, Beulah, Generation, and Ulro. There being no conflict, Beulah is full of heavenly peace, where all is one and in unity with nothing divided from within or without. It is where "the inmost form" of the *threefold* bliss can be found. Generation is the normal, natural world of reality. The lower world is Ulro, which is the material world of torment, suffering, and death, the abode of the fallen souls. Blake's justly famous "The Crystal Cabinet" illustrates the three levels beginning with the twofold Generation of the speaker's wild and merry dancing as it proceeds to the momentary (golden, crystal) threefold state of Beulah through the sexual union of rather possessive love before it falls into the realm of woes and weeping.

Writing in the persona of the prophetic poet who sees the "present, past and future," Blake expresses his radicalism and unorthodoxy through his ideas of *vision* and *imagination*, innocence and experience, marriage of heaven and hell and numerous other prophecies. In Blake, "vision" and "imagination" together with "perception," "prophecy," "infinity" and "eternity" are some of the key terms suggesting more than what they literally mean and setting the tone of his original radical ideas. His emphasis on "innocence" and "experience"—the "two contrary states of the human soul," without which, he believed, there was "no progression"—suggests the quality and nature of his works. He creates a mythical system of his own based on his concepts of the pre- and post-lapsarian states of being. The central image of his complex private system is "the Universal Man" or "the Human Form Divine," which, following the fall, fell into division giving rise to selfhood and isolated individuals. While the redemption of the fallen humanity is possible through the operation of Orc, the mythical figure who represents the fiery spirit of rebellion, the ultimate resurrection to unity in the Universal Man will take place through that of Los, who represents visionary imagination or the unified imaginative perception of the prophetic bard. As a

result, both revolutionary and imaginative changes in the world and in the human mind are correlative with each other, the latter finally replacing the former.

Blake was a visionary who from his early childhood lived in a world of spiritual or "numinous presences," and saw through his "corporeal and vegetative eye" visions of "such intense cathectic power that they were projected before his eyes as apparitions."[10] The images he envisioned were not "hallucinations" or "delusions of sense-perception" but his own "self-inspired visions," whose "actual presence could no more be doubted by [him]...than, say, a dreamer, without waking up, could doubt his own dreams in the course of dreaming them."[11] In a 22 November 1802 verse letter to his friend and patron Thomas Butts, he made his "compound visionary credo" explicit:

> Now I a *fourfold* vision see,
> And a *fourfold* vision is given to me;
> 'Tis *fourfold* in my supreme delight
> And *threefold* in soft Beulah's night
> And *twofold* Always. May God us keep
> From *Single* vision & Newton's sleep. (my emphasis)

The verse letter, of which the above are the last lines,

> distinguishes four ways of viewing the natural world, ... [which] are related to the four states' of human consciousness—from Ulro (the world view of Newtonian science), through Generation, and Beulah, to the ultimate imaginative vision, Eden, in which the objects of the world of nature, freed from the illusory categories of time and space, are revealed in their eternal and human forms. This highest "fourfold vision" is correlated also, in Blake's mythology, with the "expanded" and integral vision of the world as perceived by the "human fourfold"—that is, by the four Zoas when they have been reintegrated into the redeemed Albion. (*Norton Anthology*, p.75, n.4)

Blake's creation of a complex private mythology in his prophetic works such as *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Los*, *Vala or The Four Zoas*, *America: A Prophecy*, *Europe: A Prophecy*, *The French*

Revolution, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*, earned him the reputation of being a so-called "mad mystic," strange and uninterpretable. Recalling his meeting with Blake in 1811, Robert Southey observed, "His madness was too evident, too fearful. It gave his eyes an expression such as you would expect to see in one who was possessed." The lawyer and literary diarist Henry Crabb Robinson, who became closely acquainted with Blake in his last years, made in contrast this entry about his (Blake's) gift of vision: "Shall I call him Artist or Genius—or Mystic or Madman? Probably he is all." Later Robinson made a comment which not only qualified the above one but virtually challenged Southey's:

> In the sweetness of his countenance & gentility of his manner he added an indescribable grace to his conversation...his observations, apart from his visions and references to the spiritual world, were sensible and acute.

It is no wonder that T.S. Eliot with his classical, royalist, and anglo-catholic bent of mind did not like what Klonsky described as Blake's "revolutionary, millenarian, romantic and libertine" ideas. Despite his criticism of "crankiness" and "eccentricity" of Blake's poetry, Eliot admitted that, for its "naked honesty," it had the "unpleasantness of great poetry." "What his genius required, and what he sadly lacked," Eliot added, "was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attentions upon the problems of the poet."

Understandably, Blake's works were, for the most part, ignored or unknown for a number of factors. He (along with his other siblings, especially his older brother) had the "peculiar propensities" of seeing, according to Duncan Wu, the biblical prophets and angels up in trees and his works, both printed and illuminated by hand, had a limited circulation with his drawings to illustrate them being of untraditional and experimental techniques.[12] Having fallen out with the Rev. Dr. John Trusler, who angrily considered him "dimmed with superstition," Blake did not illustrate some of Trusler's works as he was supposed to. Trusler told him: "Your fancy seems to be in the other world, or the world of spirits, which accords not with my intentions."[13] Blake,