

## WILLIAM BLAKE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH ROMANTICISM

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**Abstract.** *The first English romantic artist was Fuseli's follower William Blake (1757-1827). Unlike his happier predecessor Henry Fuseli, Blake lived a difficult life, full of trials and unfinished works. This article illustrates his originative life period.*

**Keywords:** *creations, original, interaction, art, early age, imagination, works, concepts.*

During his life, William Blake managed to create a huge number of works in the field of painting and literature. Moreover, it should be noted that, unlike other artists of brush and word, his creative skills did not decline with age, but rather improved. By the end of his life, truly masterpieces of his work came out of his pen and brush, for example, illustrations for Dante's "Divine Comedy" (1826), where William Blake showed both the depth of literary thought and ease of use of the brush, which had not been observed in him before. For this work, Blake created over a hundred compositions, but only a few were engraved. They can hardly be called illustrations; these sheets have more of an easel character.

Their figurative design, free and flexible form are born of the artist's unfettered creative imagination and at the same time an immensely reverent attitude towards the text, which Blake read in the original, having studied Italian for this purpose, already in old age. Some sheets amaze with the unprecedented boldness of their

compositional and spatial constructions. In the watercolor "Whirlwind of lovers. Paolo and Francesca" : the rising wave, writhing like a snake, carries a stream of bodies into infinity, and the main characters, caught by jets of water, are thrown down, powerless to resist the inexorable movement. In contrast to the strictly graphic design of the engravings for the Book of Job, where everything is said by the line, the stroke and the variety of their interactions and combinations, in the sheets to Dante's poem the importance of the outline, although indisputable, still sometimes gives way to the exquisite richness and expression of color. The coloring gravitates either towards a muted transparent range ( "The Gates of Hell" ), or towards more sonorous combinations of reddish-pinkish, bluish, warm grayish tones ( "Beatrice on the Chariot" ), but invariably maintains harmony the finest nuances. In this harmony, in the exquisite musicality of compositional and linear rhythms, the echo of the solemn structure of Dante's terzas seems to pulsate.[3]

Blake is credited with being the harbinger of new romantic ideals in art. Unlike Fuseli, he created romantic art in an open, albeit unequal struggle with the all-powerful Academy of Arts, which cultivated the art and aesthetics of late mannerism. Blake was a true Londoner. He was born in 1757 in London. His father was a small knitwear merchant and owned a small store. The environment in which he grew up was not at all associated with art, but from an early age Blake wrote poetry and painted. The boy, at the age of 10, was sent to Henry Parse's drawing school in the Strand. Education at this school, as well as at the Academy, was based on copying ancient copies. Blake gained knowledge of ancient sculpture and architecture there. At the age of 14, he met the graphic artist James Basir, who took the aspiring artist under his wing. Basir commissioned Blake to copy sculpture and interiors of ancient churches for him. For several years, Blake translated Gothic sculpture and church painting into watercolor [4].

It is obvious that these youthful activities largely determined the subsequent style of Blake's work, in which line plays a paramount role. Blake worked at Basir's studio for about seven years. When he turned 21, he decided to earn a living by his own labor. He began drawing for commercial magazines. At the same time, he

attended the art school of the Academy of Arts, where a living nature class was opened. But Blake refused to attend full-scale classes, since they required an accurate reproduction of nature and interfered with the work of the imagination; he, like Henry Fuseli, believed that the lack of full-scale observations could lead to a certain figurative stamp in the least successful works[3]. But the main thing in Blake's work was illustrating his own poetry books. He first created the drawings in ink and then hand painted them with watercolors. This technique did not allow the creation of a large number of copies, but those that were created did not have much commercial demand. Blake achieved harmonious unity between text and drawings by creating an ornamental frame on the page. But Blake did not immediately come to illustrating his poetic works. In 1782 Blake married Catherine Boucher.[1]

Although the marriage was not a happy one, Catherine proved to be a good assistant to Blake and eventually learned to color his work. A year after Blake's marriage, his first unillustrated book, *Poetic Sketches*, was published, to which he spent six years writing. This was followed by the collection "Island on the Moon".

The book includes several beautiful lyric poems that were not known from other Blake manuscripts. There are other poems in it, which were later included by him in the book "Songs of Innocence" (1789), it was the first book he illustrated. He decided the text and illustrations of this book, or rather, the artistic design, as a single whole, printing them on one board using the technique of convex etching, which he specially invented for this and subsequent editions (he himself called this technique "wood engraving on copper"), in which the text and image are printed in a raised manner, and the background remains white.

The prints were colored by hand, so they all turned out different. The outline, as a rule, was not black, but colored - brown or blue, which gave a special charm and softness to the line. In these small sheets, Blake develops the tradition of medieval illuminated manuscripts with their complex and rich ornamentation, combining plant motifs and human figures, with absolute harmony of text and image. And at the same time, he anticipates the later experiments of William Morris, the reformer of the

English book, dating back to the second half of the 19th century. The drawings in these sheets cannot be perceived outside of their literary basis. They are equally diverse in meaning, intonation, figurative (direct or metaphorical) concept.[2] After “Songs of Innocence” appears “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” (1790-1793), its text was surrounded by engravings, as if engulfed in flames. The meaning of many images remains not fully disclosed and in any case is perceived in the most general sense for lexical unity and personification of Good and Evil, Man and God, soul and body, imagination and dogma. In his works, Blake creates his own mythology, often putting abstract concepts into symbolic images: Love, Happiness, Imagination, Passion, for example, “America” (1793) . At the same time, real scenes are sometimes included in the context of fantastic images symbolizing the essential principles of existence on a universal scale and in the microcosm of human life. An example is the tragic sheet “The Plague” in the book “Europe” (1794), giving rise to associations with some sheets of Goya’s “Caprichos”. Blake himself was well aware that his symbolic language would be inaccessible to many. “I know that my world is a world of imagination and images.

I see everything I depict from this world, but not everyone sees it the same way.” One of the darkest creations of Blake's fantasy is the evil and powerful tyrant Urizen - a peculiar interpretation of Jehovah, the personification of everything that fetters and limits the freedom of man, subordinating him to the omnipotence of measure and calculation. The symbol of personal enslavement in the engraving “Nebuchadnezzar” (1800) - the image of a man turned into a four-legged animal with a face distorted by despair and anger.

One of Blake's most richly illustrated books is “Jerusalem” (1821). It depicts England, which has fallen into a sleep, symbolizing the dominance of abstract materialism. In the engravings for the “Book of Job” (1818-1825) he returns to the principle of a synthetic solution of his first books, but uses a very subtle and at the same time dynamic and intense linear style in the central compositions and a lighter, more transparent style in the frames.

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