Myths, Symbols and Stylistic Innovations in Blake and Gibran

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the words of Jacob Bronowski:

We mistake the language, and we mistake the meanings, of Blake’s prophetic books, if we forget the reasons which made Blake choose and change that language. Blake chose his prophetic symbols because he found them apt to what he was saying; but he changed their meanings, as the reason for their aptness changed.5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Prisoned on watery shore,

Starry jealousy does keep my den

Cold and hoar;

Weeping o're,

I hear the father of the ancient men.

‘Selfish father of men!

Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!

Can delight,

Chained in night,

The virgins of youth and morning bear?

"Does spring hide its joy,

When buds and blossoms grow?

Does the sower

Sow by night,

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

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

\(^7\) Mary Lynn Johnson and John E, Grant, ed., Blake’s *Poetry and Designs* (New York: W.W Norton and Company, 1979) 41.
more sterile and parched. There is nothing colourful about it. ‘Darkness’, ‘grey’, ‘starry’, ‘hoar’ and ‘night’ all add to this colourless picture. Other factors which in the poem further call attention to white, black and grey are the images like ‘Stony’, ‘Chain, and ‘Freeze’. All of these are colourless. Earth does not sense any softness or movement of water. Metal, stone and ice surround her.

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

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

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

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

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

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8 *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, P. 53.
combines the word ‘marriage’ with the word ‘hearse’ - a vehicle associated with funerals. It is because the loveless marriage brings nothing but death and decay.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘What immortal hand and eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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languages.”

Both these poets faced the dilemma of having to express the inexpressible. That is why they firstly chose poetry and secondly utilized the literary device of symbolism. Poetic signification is sought in order to attempt transmitting gnosis to the reader. Because the poets are creators and their creations are new even to them most of the times, the two poets refused to accept the systems of other men, or the symbols of old tradition. Very much like Blake, Gibran takes a lot of help from Bible especially Gospels. In the words of Joseph P. Ghousgassian, “It is important to keep in mind that the Bible has always been for Gibran, as it was for Blake, a source of prophetic inspiration that presented a visionary narrative of the life of man between creation and apocalypse.”

Apart from Bible and Blake, Nietzsche was also a major influence on Gibran. He has most influenced Gibran’s method of expression. From him he learnt how to communicate his ideas in a prophetic overtone. He in the same way as Nietzsche used provocative and inciting style for reproaching organized religion and the state institutions. Gibran always appreciated Nietzsche’s style of writing especially in his *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. All his works, particularly *The Prophet*, *The Madman*, *The Forerunner*, and *The Tempest* reverberate with Nietzschean influence particularly in their mythical style, parallelism, biblical language, repetition, etc. Ghousgassian writes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And I say that life is indeed darkness *save when* there is *urge*,

And all *urge* is blind *save when* there is *knowledge*,

And all *knowledge* is vain *save when* there is *work*,

And all *work* is empty *save when* there is *love*;

And when you work with *love* you bind yourself to yourself,

and to one another, and to God. 22

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

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