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WILLIAM BLAKE AND THE ROOTS OF POST-HUMANISM: THE BOUNDARIES OF HUMANITY IN *THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL*

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Abstract
In this paper, William Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (written 1790–1793) is studied using post-humanist theory to argue that Blake recognized these issues well before the term was coined. Blake's poetry and philosophy have typically been studied under Romantic, mystical, and aesthetic theories, but this study looks at them as early critiques of Enlightenment humanism. By studying Blake's poetry with literary analysis and attention to the setting, the paper shows how he challenges good/evil, body/soul, and human/non-human concepts, ideas that are also questioned by post-humanism. By praising imagination, energy, and contradiction, Blake presents an identity that changes according to relationship but is not centered on people. Highlighting Blake's affirmation of plenty, his rejection of religious tradition, and his use of animal and technological imagery in his illuminated writings, the study shows his fitting into ecological and cybernetic concepts in post-humanist theory. As a result, this paper shows that Blake anticipates post-humanist ideas, and his writings are very relevant to current discussions about human identity, bodies, and the edges of being an individual.

INTRODUCTION

Blake brought poetic words, a spiritual outlook, and visual beauty into his work. Blake, who existed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, still makes a remarkable difference in literature, philosophy, and cultural theory. By merging several literary styles into one text, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–1793) praises a merging of ideas and thoughts while criticizing the usual division of faith, morals, and intellect (Blake, 1790–1793). Blake challenges the old ways people think about themselves by imagining them differently and often turning things upside down. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, Blake produced his poetry, when industry was mechanical, science dominated, and social order was challenged. It gives an alternative tale to those who value reason, order, and science highly. Instead, he argues that spiritual energy, being lively, and showing creativity are important parts of human life. Blake stresses in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that "Without Contraries, there would be no progression" (1790–1793, Plate 3). It notes that his view is that these opposing forces can produce new things.

Modern post-humanist theory, working to diminish the importance of the human subject, changes set ideas of identity and questions the beliefs of humanism about autonomy, reason, and the divide

between people and other creatures, correspond quite well with this philosophy (Hayles, 1999). Blake elaborated on his thoughts before posthumanism was born, yet many of his ideas could easily lead us into the subjects it addresses by also challenging the idea of strict separations and suggesting there are many aspects to human nature. This paper asserts that *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* reflects ideas of post-humanism. Analyzing Blake's works regarding energy, imagination, and divinity, this research makes clear that Blake both opposes common ideas of his time and introduces the theoretical basis for exploring human identity in later investigations. This analysis shows that Blake's outstanding goal is maintained in current talks about consciousness, transformation, and humanity by mixing Romantic poetry with post-humanism.

Statement of the Problem

Though *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is well known for its religious imagery and style, little research has focused on Blake's philosophical musings about humanity. In general, literary critics have mostly looked at the text's form and religious themes and ignored its challenge to Enlightenment thinking and significance for post-humanism. Blake altered common binary ideas, like good and evil, body and soul, and human and non-human; this points to his radical new way of considering what it means to be human. This study is meant to fill this scholarly gap by examining how *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* looks ahead to important topics in post-humanist theory and challenges main ideas from traditional humanist thinking.

Research Objectives

- To explore how Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* connects with principal ideas from post-humanist theory
- To analyze how Blake attacks traditional pairings such as good and evil, the links between the body and soul, and people versus non-humans through poetry and philosophy

Research Questions

1. In what ways does *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by Blake challenge common Enlightenment ideas like good/evil and body/soul, and what does this mean for how human identity is seen?
2. How does Blake's poetry in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* look ahead to the ideas of fluid subjectivity, hybridity, and human decentralization?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been increased focus on Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by contemporary theoreticians, in addition to the usual interest from Romantic and mystical studies. More people now see that Blake, in his writing, was addressing questions that are important in current discussions about humans, decision-making, and nature.

Buckley (2021) remarks that Blake's well-known statement, "Without Contraries there is no progress," seriously undermines the act of simply thinking of things in pairs. Blake rejects labeling good and evil, mind and body, or human and animal as guaranteed as or higher than all other alternatives. His approach is to see these opposing forces as movement-generating and transformational. He aligns his argument with what post-humanist critiques say, which challenges the traditional view that humans are different or superior to the non-human world. It reveals that the idea of a disconnected rational human is mistaken, in favor of emphasizing how we openly depend on others.

Through criticizing dualism, Blake joins in the thinking of those who see identity as formed by our interactions, instead of seeing it as originally fixed. This matters since post-humanism aims to give equal consideration to both humans and to things such as animals, machines, and ecosystems. This way of thinking about progress through opposites was present in Blake's work, long before it appeared elsewhere (Effinger, 2022).

Gonzalez, & Blake rely on Frye's (1957) and similar views to contend that Blake places imagination as the leading way to discover truth. Here, we are rejecting the Enlightenment idea that reason is the core part of what makes us human. Alternatively, Blake looks to feelings, imagination, and intuition as ways of knowing, which are similar to categories valued by post-humanist theories (Gonzalez & Blake, 2022).

Blake sees imagination in his work not only as fantasy, but as a powerful force called "Energy" that drives

change and opposes what does not grow. By bringing in mythological concepts, this energy disturbs the idea of a fixed, rational self, pointing ahead to how people think about themselves today. Ritchie (2025) points out that Blake's poetry resists traditional stories, spiritualism, and catastrophic imagination and supports many identities. The idea of humans as unique has decreased over time, which is a central argument in ecological post-humanist theory and meaningfully addressed in recent Blake studies. In Leveton's study, humans, nature, and the heavens are seen to be skillfully linked by Blake (Leveton, 2021). This connects with Morton's (2019) approach, which argues that the connections between people and others living in the same ecosystem are not simple. Many of Blake's poems and prints suggest a merging of different forms—spiritual, human, and animal—and question the exactness of these distinctions. The author Essick says that by combining images and text, Blake is portraying this mixed identity. Such texts blur art and literature, separate human and non-human entities, and highlight a whole vision that is strongly post-humanist. He argues that Blake was a strong critic of Enlightenment humanism. Since Blake rejects the idea that human beings are the universe's main point of view, he allows the possibility of other ways of understanding stress transformation, difference, and acceptance. The Echo focuses on encouraging various ideas and aims are The Seals aim to overturn outdated, structured achievements. This approach also looks forward to the post-humanist view that recognizes the knowledge and powers of non-human actors, together with knowledge different from what might be considered human. Through this idea, Blake's texts remove our sole focus on human beings and deepen discussions of what it means to be or to do (Leveton, 2021). These new studies help one see Blake not only as a Romantic or visionary poet, but as an early artist whose writing explores important themes later known as post-humanist. His Marriage of Heaven and Hell challenges the differences between good and evil, between body and soul, and between human beings and others, by proposing a larger, adaptable sense of what it means to be human. Thanks to this perspective, readers today can use Blake's writing to explore new ideas about who we are, what is right, and our dealings with technology, the environment, and beyond.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative analysis of Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is performed in this research to find its links to post-humanism. Literary analysis is a good choice for this because it allows teachers to closely examine the text's language, symbols, and organization to find how Blake disputes popular views of human identity, morality, and what it is to be human. The basic step is to closely examine *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, paying special attention to parts that reveal Blake's challenge to common distinctions such as good and evil, body and soul, and human and non-human. Eye-catching elements, including Blake's interesting use of paradox, symbolism, and how prose and poetry work together, will be looked at closely in passages dealing with angels, devils, energy, reason, and the soul.

After the close reading, the study explores main themes in the text, such as:

- The idea is that imagination and energy are more worthy than the role of reason.
- Disgust with absolute morals and strong religions.
- The turning away from views of the self that put humans first and see them as machines.
- To study these themes, post-humanist theory will be applied, using the theories of N.

Katherine Hayles (1999) and Timothy Morton (2010). Placing Blake's imagery side by side with theories, the study seeks to examine the ways *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* speaks to modern issues about self, nature, and the boundaries of human reason.

To make the analysis richer and more accurate over time, this study includes contextual analysis. When Blake wrote, it was an age when industrial capitalism, scientific thinking, and Enlightenment ideas were growing. W. Blake expressed strong opinions against the dominance of old concepts like Newton's Law or Cartesian mechanical philosophy at the time, by revealing a personal spirit and imagination to society. Studying the ideas around Blake will help show how his poetry works against mainstream thoughts and points to a rethinking of the bond between humans and other beings.

To conclude, the research uses a comparison theory to relate Blake's Romantic ideas with major post-humanist principles. This means looking at where Blake's visionary ideas meet with modern debates on human importance, the changing idea of body lines, and critiques of binary thinking. Using secondary sources and theory, this study will create a dialogue between Blake and post-humanist discourse, meaning *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* must be seen as a proto-post-humanist document.

Theoretical Framework

The research aims to examine *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by bringing together textual analysis of Blake with post-human inquiry to explore what the text thinks about human identity. This framework uses Romantic literary ideas such as Blake's idea of imagination, as well as some concepts from recent post-humanist thinking. The post-humanist project and Blake's vision work together to show how he foresaw and echoed an approach that focuses on existence beyond the human subject. Key to this framework is the suggestion to reconsider the image of the independent, thinking individual from the Enlightenment. People such as N. Katherine Hayles argues that current post humanism fails to recognize how humans, gadgets, environments, and other non-living things are intertwined. Blake proposes a different idea of subjectivity that stays flexible, plays with imagination, and also relates to others, unlike developmental psychology's standard idea. We might read his views as a precursor to post-humanist theories that make the self-flexible, open to change, and able to hold contradictions.

Blake's preference for energy, imagination, and creativity over calm, logical ideas show the same move away from a predictable way of thinking that marked post-humanist beliefs. He says in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that *"Energy is Eternal Delight,"* meaning that imagination is the main reason for change and evolution. This approach agrees with post-humanism, which values changing, affective, and non-binary types of understanding and existence and opposes systems based on fixed beliefs.

A major part of the subject is recognizing how culture can be influenced by many different factors. Many of Blake's works blend the borders of body and soul, human and non-human, and divine and animal, meaning he saw everything as one long continuum, not as a series of distinct categories. This vision matches post-humanist aims to dig down ontological walls and focus on the involved, linked way life and systems evolve. So, Blake's combination of images represents concepts about intertwined ecological and philosophical issues that arise in a post-humanist view. This theory establishes the lens for our investigation, which will bring together ideas from Romanticism and post-humanism in Blake's work.

ANALYSIS

In this section, scholars have closely analyzed *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* to show that it promotes a view against Enlightenment humanism and looks ahead to post-humanist theory. His frequent use of opposites, break with traditional pairs, and emphasis on creativity cause the text to undermine the usual view of human identity. Every point below is illustrated using examples from the text and backed up by post-humanist theories from N. Katherine Hayles and Timothy Morton.

Using Contraries Fortifies Our Personal Growth

He begins the work by saying:

"Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (Plate 3).

If there were no differences, there would be no improvement. The forces of Attraction and Repulsion and the sensations of Reason and Energy make up the human experience with Love and Hate (Plate 3). This introduction explains his view that opposites stimulate each other, rather than fight or resist. Blake sees contraries as important to life, rather than as obstacles to overcome. This idea reflects post-humanist theory, especially Hayles' (1999) claim that identity comes from flexible, connected systems more than from fixed, logical ones.

Attack on Inflexible Morality

He opposes the typical ideas of Christian morality.

"Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy" (Plate 3).

With this reversal, Gnosticism sets up "evil" as a force of inspiration, challenging the quiet obedience tied to

"good." Unlike sticking to a limited moral code, Blake praises energy, rebellion, and transformation, in the same way that post-humanist ethics prize lively, revolting, and transforming interaction with the world. His philosophy fits seamlessly with primarily affirmative difference and desire that is productive in Deleuze's philosophy.

The Presence of Creativity and Power as Holy Attributes

Blake declares in Plate VII what follows:

"Energy is Eternal Delight" (Plate 4).

Both spiritual and physical impacts are associated with energy here. It is the central part of both human and divine imagination. Blake's elevation of energy over reason aligns with Morton's (2019) post-humanist critique of Enlightenment rationalism, emphasizing instead the primacy of imagination, affect, and ecological awareness. Consequently, Blake's metaphysics leads us to imagine subjectivity as involving imagination, the body, and being linked with others.

Fall of the body-soul division

One of Blake's main ideas is to oppose separating the mind and body. He writes:

"Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age" (Plate 4).

This statement removes the boundaries between and above different religious traditions. Blake changes what the body means, connecting it to the senses of the soul as one entity. The notion in Blake's poetry, seen in Hayles's objection to an abstract single subject, is echoed by his theory about embodiment.

Examination of organized religious groups and their leaders

According to Blake's "Proverbs of Hell," he writes:

"Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion" (Plate 8).

"All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors: 1. That Man has two existing principles… 2. That Energy, called Evil, is alone from the Body…" (Plate 6).

They let us see how Blake fiercely opposed strict systems that limited both the mind and the body. Futuyma opposes sacred codes because post-humanists doubt the existence of one true answer that applies to all. Paralleling post-structuralist and post-humanist ideas, Blake combines different ideas and values in personal revelation.

How Excess and Desire Change the Way We See the World

Another aphorism is this:

"The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (Plate 7)

The emphasis on excess in Blake's books disputes the importance of moderation that rationalists think is good. Deleuze and Guattari's idea of "decining-production" means that becoming and intensity, rather than humans, power the process of progress and creativity. According to Blake, desire is best viewed as something that supports new thinking, growth, and leads to a sense of the divine.

Marriage of Godly and Evil

The title *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* expresses the book's main goal—to align what religion and reason usually divide. Blake writes:

"The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire is true… the world will be consumed by the fire of the imagination" (Plate 10).

The belief in early times that the world would burn away is accurate, only now the fire is the inspiration of the imagination. Blake's "marriage" represents the world he calls for, with no clear boundaries, but instead with various identities, opposite parts that blend and all transforms. As a result, after post-humanism, there is a move to redefine age-old originals as points where the human/non-human, sacred/profane, and mind/body worlds mix. Nicholas investigate the ways Blake uses different forms to give , the main topic is how Blake used his poetry and imagery to overturn hard moral and existential boundaries new perspective on human experience. In studying these dualisms, he both rejected prominent cultural and religious beliefs of his past and foreshadowed moves to overcome binary thinking in modern studies of ethics, philosophy, and identity.

CONCLUSION

Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is shown in this study to be a notable proto-post-humanist work

that opposes the traditional, fixed, and rational personhood expected in the Enlightenment through its poetic statements. The study finds that through a careful examination of Blake's use of contrasts, imagination, and the rejection of dualism, he foreshadows the contemporary objections to seeing humans as central and the mind-body structure as final. Blake's belief that good and evil, body and soul, and reason and energy go together, and drive progress, is in line with current thoughts on identity as being formed by relationships and physical and energetic context. Supporting excess, desire, and creativity in place of set morals, he separates from traditional values and sees change throughout existence as another potential, a main idea found in post-humanist and delusional thinking. Blake never accepted rigid church beliefs and was unafraid to blend holy and demonic, so he influenced the way post-humanism doubts set truths and values adaptability. When considered against the mechanistic viewpoint that began during the Industrial Revolution, this study points out that Blake's vision offers a powerful and lasting rebuke to human exceptionalism and rationalism. In short, this work expands studies about Blake and helps continue ongoing discussions across various fields that investigate shifts in human identity as we experience technological, ecological, and philosophical changes. Blake calls on his readers to see human identity as moving, related, and lively, a concept that is still truly relevant today. Blake's views on poetry and philosophy are in line with key ideas from post-humanism, such as rethinking the central place people have in society, challenging human-led thinking, and looking at identity formed by contact with non-human systems. Since The Marriage of Heaven and Hell displays proto-post-humanist qualities, the study tries to show that it opposes the Enlightenment's favored views on reason, social hierarchy, and fixed personal attributes.

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