



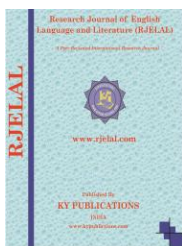
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“LYCA” – BLAKE’S ARTISTIC FOSTER-CHILD

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Abstract

William Blake is believed to be a master in portraying life and nature in words as well as images. His poems and paintings explore the relationship between human life and nature. *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* are not just poems but reflections of human life within the animal world. “Lyca” is the girl lost and found, in his twin poems, *The Little Girl Lost* and *The Little Girl Found*. The nature accepts, lulls and fosters her innocence. The poems open multiple levels of interpretation along with the fancied journey of little Lyca. She follows the songs of the birds, the music of the nature and is lost in a desert like a teenage girl answering the forbidden calls of the nature. These symbols of nature and sexuality run parallel throughout the poem. This work studies Lyca, the little girl, as the poet’s device to represent sexuality as an innocent journey towards nature and identity.

Keywords: Poetry, nature, sexuality.

William Blake showed immense love towards nature in his personal and artistic lives. The poet, who is believed to play a major role in the transition of English Poetry from Neo-classicism to Romanticism, led a liberal life. His works depict the contrast between the simplicities and complexities of human life. The nature, on the other hand, is not subject to conventions. It is blessed to be free and live life to the fullest. The human instinct to own and belong, brought in restrictions to their own lives. The sense of owning has also developed a fear of losing. Lyca, the little girl in Blake’s twin poems *The Little Girl Lost* and *The Little Girl Found*, follows the songs of the birds, the music of the nature and is lost in a dangerous desert. Her parents were in despair and on searching for her.

All the night in woe,
Lyca's parents go:
Over vallies deep,
While the deserts weep.

Tired and woe-begone,
Hoarse with making moan:
Arm in arm, seven days,
They traced the desert ways.
(The Little Girl Found)

The poem *The Little Girl Lost*, compiles a holistic image of nature - beginning from the creator (creation). The association between animal and human is employed by Blake to give a universal note that every species on earth are related, aiding his glorification of nature. The recurrence of his visionary imaginations and biblical allegories provide strength and depth to the poem, perhaps digging our minds fathoms deep regarding our existence. The poet’s intention is to show that nature extends care when our kin is lost. At this point, both the poems state the poet’s spiritual desire to be lost and found in the lap of nature. Blake followed the Bible, but denied the physical power of religion as he trusted only in the spiritual force that existed within

the nature. This radical disregard of the religious system and the submission to the spiritual power is thought to be the essence of his liberal existence. In this regard, one must consider Lyca to be the physical form of the poet's spiritual journey. The poet answers the call of the nature (his God) and wanders in search of His voice. Every human existence is thus a wandering spirit which is lost in the desert of ignorance. He is fostered by the wilderness and is found by the supreme power like the little girl. She was asleep in the lap of the nature for seven days, says the poet, which is the revelation that revives one's own spirit. Revelation is a call from the nature. It demands to be lost and regained. *The Little Girl Lost* begins with a vision of restoration. The first two stanzas stand apart as a prophecy of a revival by the 'Maker' similar to the restoration of the lost paradise or the garden of Eden.

In futurity
I prophetic see
That the earth from sleep
(Grave the sentence deep)
Shall arise, and seek
for her Maker meek;
And the desert wild
Become a garden mild.

(*The Little Girl Lost*)

The manuscript of the poem, illustrated by the poet himself, is from a different perspective. It has a couple embraced in love at the centre of a space which looks like a garden. There is an elaborate detailing of the nature around them with birds flying around the vines. Some critics doubt the suggestion of Lyca entering her adulthood. According to scholars Rodney Baine and Mary Baine, the image of the young couple embracing in the vines shows Lyca's journey into adulthood. The little girl is flowering into a new sexuality, of being a woman. The flowers, vines and the birds humming around show the romantic desires of the girl. The illustration also has a snake that separates the first two stanzas from the rest of the poem. This is a clear indication of the artist's (poet's) intention to keep the stanzas different from the others. The image of

the snake, the vines and the couple also remind one about the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve lived. The biblical story of the snake tempting them into desire is reminded here. Adam and Eve fell prey to the temptation and lost the garden. The little girl is lost in the desert while she followed the music of the nature. Sexuality is another call from the nature. Lyca, like anyone else, answers the call. Blake places this as a call towards experience which comes in at an age of transition from childhood to teenage. One cannot deny the call and move on thinking it to be forbidden. Blake is known to be a proponent of liberal sex. He believed that sexuality was an acceptance of the reality and not a taboo as the morality suggested. Lyca, like any other girl, is bewildered and lost when she is introduced to the physical and emotional changes.

There is no suggestion that the girl is afraid when she is lost in the desert. She is rather worried about her parents. She sleeps peacefully for seven days amidst the wildest of beasts. Blake points out the fears a sufferings of Lyca's parents thinking that their girl was lost. On the other side, the girl was peacefully asleep. This indicates the issues of morality in the society.

Seven nights they sleep
Among shadows deep,
And dream they see their child
Starved in desert wild.

Pale through pathless ways
The fancied image strays,
Famished, weeping, weak,
With hollow piteous shriek.

(*The Little Girl Found*)

There is a harsh reality expressed in the poem. He says that the journey of life is not easy, there exists a transformation period, from childhood to adulthood, Lyca is shedding her childhood and about to embrace her adulthood. This is a worry for her parents which is symbolically depicted as their desperate journey through the desert. The mother is afraid of the world around her daughter. This is chaos created by the morality and the system. Blake is

pointing out the pressure exerted on the girl by the society. As a girl leaves her childhood, she is thought to leave behind her innocence. The reality and the society's norms put her into further confusions and she is perplexed by the chaos around her. Lyca is seven summers old, according to the poem, but is believed to pass seven summers after puberty. This matches with the age of the adult girl in Blake's illustration. Yet, she is a little girl, who has not lost her innocence. Thus it is important to understand that the transformation caused by age is not the loss of innocence, but is just a physical change bestowed upon by the nature to open the gates of passions and desires. In Blake, the concept of sexuality and gender notions are inter-twined and has multiple layers. He portrays his characters as living beings regardless of their sex, imbuing them sufficient powers to exist with their identity. Lyca is presented in a similar way in *The Little Girl Lost*, she lost her parents but was never defeated. Blake didn't portray Lyca as a failed, insane girl repressed by social norms. She was held in a peddle as same as a boy would stand, discovering and identifying new paths of survival. Blake has a different slice of sexuality when he deals with the parents, giving way to an older moral commitment. Lyca's mother sets an example to explain Blake's other part of sexuality. The conventional custom of 'women are subordinate to men' is practised here. It's a universal notion that men are physically stronger than women, men provide security to women and therefore, are secondary to men. The poet employs double standards of morality to delve into how orthodox generations exert pressure on their liberal counterparts. *The Little Girl Lost* and *The Little Girl Found* are apparently poems on innocence, but it is interesting to note where the readers stand in these poems. They are taken on a journey with an innocent girl into a romantic wilderness until the end of the first poem.

Leopards, tigers, play
Round her as she lay;
While the lion old
Bowed his mane of gold,
And her breast did lick
And upon her neck,

From his eyes of flame,
Ruby tears there came;
While the lioness
Loosed her slender dress,
And naked they conveyed
To caves the sleeping maid.
(The Little Girl Lost)

The nakedness and sexual overtones on the innocence of the little girl disturb the readers. This is a questioning on the morality of the reader. The old lion and its golden manes symbolize the adult male sexuality. Thus the readers deny the sexual power dominating the innocence. They cannot accept when innocence and sexuality are attributed to the same character. These lines question the inherent human morality that says sexuality is the other side of innocence. When sexuality dominates, innocence withers, they believe. Blake tries to prove it wrong through this poem and is blending sexuality and innocence together. Blake places Lyca as an embodiment of his liberal perspective towards life. Though *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are considered to be phases in human life, there is a moral issue that restrains the aesthetics. Lyca's journey is a search of passions and desires. It is a call from the nature to that cannot be turned down. It is unethical to repress one's emotions and deny the natural instincts. Society sets up its own norms to withhold its supremacy. The poem questions such moral interventions and reminds that the union between the creator and his creation takes place through these journeys. They often end up in revelations and spiritual restorations of the individual as well as the humanity.

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