

Blake's Dramatic Imagination

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戯曲家ウィリアム・ブレイクの想像力*

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要旨

ウィリアム・ブレイク (1757 - 1827) の作品を論じるときに宗教観あるいは宇宙観的思想の特異性において論じられることが多い。ブレイクを《人間性》に重点を置くならば、文学的な意味での人間と人間のコミュニケーションを題材にした作品に焦点を絞って考えてみるのも必要なことと言える。芸術論を論じたアリストテレス以来の悲劇と喜劇を考えると、その悲劇と喜劇は表裏一体であり、特に喜劇の中に神秘性が潜んでいると考えられる。喜劇とはユーモアであると同時に皮肉が込められている諷刺劇であるからである。その意味において、『月の中の島』 (*An Island in the Moon*, c 1784) は極めて初期の作品でありながら、ブレイクを思想の重要な鍵を握っている作品と言えよう。なぜならば、『無垢の歌』 (*Songs of Innocence*, 1789) から『無垢と経験の歌』 (*Songs of Innocence and Experience*, 1794) への変遷と Zoas の誕生がすでに見られるからである。また、ブレイクの一連の予言書に登場する Zoas のモチーフが実は初期のどの段階で生まれたのか、また、「人間の精神の相反する2つの状態 (The Two Contrary States of the Human Soul)」がどのようにして生まれたのかを今一度考察してみることにもつながる意味で意味深いからである。そして、興味深い点はブレイクは戯曲家あるいは物語作家として作品を書こうとしていたのではないかと、という点である。後期予言書は形式的には叙事詩ではあるが物語詩であり、ある意味では戯曲的であると言える。その原点としての『月の中の島』は詩人としてのブレイクの顔はもちろんであるが、小説家としての姿勢、シェイクスピアよろしく問題劇とも言える喜

劇作家としての様相を見せてくれているのである。

An Island in the Moon already included three poems of *Songs of Innocence*: "Holy Thursday," "Nurse's Song" and "The Little Boy Lost."

In the Moon, is a certain Island near by a mighty continent, which small island seems to have some affinity to England. & what is more extraordinary the people are so much alike & their language so much the same that you would think you was among your friends.

(*An Island in the Moon* Chapter 1)

Blake intentionally wrote "In the Moon, a certain Island" to satirize the status of England at that time. It shows that the 'moon' means 'lunatic' and the English people are all mad. Obviously Blake tried to show the crazy characteristics of the English people.

An Island in the Moon is composed by the dramatic method. Therefore, the characters need to be examined in detail, because their roles show the foolish states of human beings. The dramatic personae are Quid the Cynic: Blake himself, Suction the Epicurian: Blake's brother Robert, Sipsop the Pythagorean, Etruscan Colum the Antiquarian, Mrs Gimblet, Inflammable Gass: J. Priestly + Katterfelto (Mrs Gabble Gabble his wife), Obtuse Angle: T. Taylor, Steelyard the lawgiver: John Flaxman, Tilly Lally the Siptippidist, Aradobo the Dean of Morocco, Miss Gittipin, Mrs Nannicantipot, Mrs Sistagatist (Mrs Sinagain), Little Scopporell [Narrator].

These characters can be shown to have very interesting characters through their names. Once,

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in the previous chapter, Blake was very cynical, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Such a cynical aspect of Blake's was already fulfilled in this *Island in the Moon*. This is a cardinal point of his writing technique. It is no exaggeration to say that all his writings represented this technique.

When *An Island in the Moon* was written in 1784, Blake was in rather good circumstances. Two years before, on 18 August 1782, he had married Catherine Boucher, who was the uneducated daughter of a Battersea market gardener. Blake was twenty years old; and he began a printing house at 27 Broad Street together with James Parker, helped by his younger brother Robert, who, after his death, would give Blake poetical and painting inspiration. Therefore, Blake and Robert were always working together. The two brothers play the main roles in *An Island in the Moon*.

Northrop Frye discusses this work *An Island in the Moon*, which has been treated as a satirical work in *Fearful Symmetry* as follows:

The uncompromising misogyny of "Hail, Matrimony," and the physical awareness of the repulsive in "When old corruption first begun," are in the Swift tradition, and Blake's power of reducing cultured conversation to the chattering of sophisticated monkeys shows a Hogarthian command of the grotesque.⁽¹⁾

"Hail, Matrimony" and "When old corruption first begun" are ballad-songs sung by Quid, Blake himself. These songs contain Blake's irony fully, though they are traditional ballads. Frye says, "The characters, as we should expect, are not so much individuals as representatives of the various types of "reasoning" which are satirized."⁽²⁾ However, then, Blake found the characters shown as sings of his Prophetic Works, especially, *Vdala, or the Four Zoas*.

In the first Chapter, we, in fact, encounter the word 'reason,' as follows:

"Your reason-Your reason?" said Inflammable

Gass. "Why-" why, I think it very abominable to call a man a blockhead that you "know nothing of."

"Reason, Sir?" said the Antiquarian. "I'll give you an example" "for your reason...."

Blake, in this scene, used the word 'reason' for the first time in his writings. And this 'reason' shows the Age of Reason as well as fallen human beings. David V. Erdman relevantly makes interesting comments on this 'reason': "Blake's theory admits of a true or necessary Reason as "the bound or outward circumference of Energy" but leaves it no role in "life" except to be pushed about. Reason is the horizon kept constantly on the move by man's infinite desire."⁽³⁾ And about the personification of this 'reason,' Urizen: "Blake will soon invent for this sterile god a comic name, Nobodaddy (old daddy Nobody), and an epic name, Urizen, signifying your reason (not mine) and the limiting horizon (Greek *ὀρίσειν*, to bound)."⁽⁴⁾ Blake's intentional use of 'reason' is against the foolishness of his age. He had already been conscious of 'reason' before his later Prophetic writings. At the same time, he had practiced the idea of 'contrary' indirectly. This scene exploits the contrariness between Inflammable Gass and Etruscan Colum. Hence, *An Island in the Moon* offers the basic idea of Blake's writings, though it is written incompletely.

European countries were hostile to Britain, when, *An Island in the Moon* was written, while Britain, which has been defeated in the American Revolution, was suffering from a great disappointment. Then, in 1784, Vincenzo Lunardi landed at Wear, in a balloon, flying over London which had a population of one hundred fifty thousand. At that time, the balloon's fuel, hydrogen, was called inflammable gas. Dr. George Fordyce, who was a doctor in St. Thomas Hospital, supplied this hydrogen. Lunardi's balloon was exhibited in the Pantheon, while the Balloon Bonnet was very popular. At the same tune, the rhyme of 'moon' and 'balloon' came into fashion, added to the pun of 'Lunardi' and 'lunatic.' These episodes, which were implied in this writing, allow the abstract *An Island in the*

Moon to be dated, 1784.

Quid (=Blake) and Suction(=Robert) converse freely with each other on poetry and philosophy in Chapter seven,

Then said Quid,

“I think that Homer is bombast, & Shakespeare is too wild, & Milton has no feelings: they might be easily outdone. Chatterton never writ those poems! A parcel of fools, going to Bristol! If I was to go, I'd find it out in a minute, but I've found it out already. If I don't know then all up next year in the Exhibition, I'll be hang'd, said Suction. “Hang Philosophy! I would not give a farthing for it! Do all by your feelings, and never think at all about it. I'm hang'd if I don't get up to-morrow morning by four o'clock & work Sir Joshua.”

Blake criticizes such great poets Homer, Shakespeare and Milton, to have pretty much confidence in himself as a poet. Above all, he has a spirit of ambition and criticism. Especially, Suction's line, “Hang Philosophy! I would not give a farthing for it do all by your feeling and never think at all about it” is very bitter. Thus both criticism against philosophy and the principle of affirming feeling are connected to his later poems.

An Island in the Moon implied three poems of *Songs of Innocence*, preceding the volume. “Holy Thursday,” “Nurse's Song” and “The Little Boy Lost.” However, these poems can not always be regarded as the same ones as those of *Songs of Innocence*. One great difference is that the readers of these two workers are distinct. The objects of *An Island in the Moon* are the people of the salon in those days, while those of *Songs of Innocence* are little children.

The three poems are all sung in Chapter 11, preceding *Songs of Innocence*. Obtuse Angle sings the original poem of “Holy Thursday.” He is a thickheaded man who is lacking in intelligence, as the name sham. ‘Intelligence’ is distinguished from ‘reason’ in Blake's thoughts. ‘It is rather similar to imagination.’

Upon a holy thursday their innocent faces clean
The children walking two & two in grey & blue & green
Grey haeded beedles walked before with wands as white as snow
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like thanes water flow
O what a multitude they seemd, these flowers of London town
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
The hum of multitudes were there but multitudes of lambs
Thousands of little girls & boys raising their innocent hands
Then like a mighty wind they raise to heavn the voice of song
Or like harmnious thundersings the seats of heavn smong
Beneath them sit the revrend men the guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity lest you drive an angel from your door

This poem is unnecessary for the reason why the song must be sung in this scene. The allegorical characters play their selfish roles in this drama. It is important that Obtuse Angle feels children are happy, judging by appearances, because of his dullness. He is too blind to understand that English lower-class children were admired only on Holy Thursday. Blake's ‘innocence’ means ‘dullness’ ‘thickhead,’ or ‘ignorance,’ while *Songs of Innocence* may be poems written as an admonition about stupid people. The *Songs* was, however, written for young little children intentionally. Blake wrote the poems to help them be happy. Hence, it is evident that *An Island in the Moon* was written with a different intent from the *Songs*. In *An Island in the Moon*, grown-ups who fully know Good and Evil in the world, had to be the readers. The role of Obtuse Angle is that of a fool, a clown. The readers need to be men passing through the state of ‘experience,’ Then, the ‘experience’ is the state of a man of sense. The original poem of “Holy Thursday” is sometimes a song of literal innocence, ‘naïve’ while when men of sense read it, it is an ironical song against a man of ‘ignorance.’

The original poem of “Nurse a Song” is sung by Mrs. Nannicantipot. The theme of this poem is the same as that of *Innocence*, as well as the original of “Holy Thursday.” In response to Obtuse Angle's song, she begins to sing her song, saying, “It puts me in mind of my mother's song:

When the tongues of children are heard on the green
 And laughing is heard on the hill
 My heart is at rest within my breast
 And every thing else is still

Then come home my children the sun is gone down
 And the dews of night arise
 Come Come leave off play & let us away
 Till the morning appears in the skies

No No let us play for it is yet day
 And we cannot go to sleep
 Besides the Sky the little birds fly
 And the meadows are covered with Sheep

Well Well go & play till the light fades away
 And then go home to bed
 The little ones leaped & shouted & laughd
 And all the hills echoed

Mrs. Nannicantipot is quite a sociable and active woman. And also she is an atheist. To Blake, an atheist is a social evil. She is similar to 'the aged men' of "Holy Thursday" in *Innocence*. Her song, seemingly, is heard devout, but she is too indecisive. This poem has a pastoral image, on the whole. Children play in the field during the day, and go home before sunset. It is the cycle of a day. Blake often uses this pattern in his poetry. However, the pattern in this poem is too childish and too idealistic for Mrs. Nannicantipot to tell in this scene, though she remembers her childhood. Obtuse Angle tells about the real world, under the Industrial Revolution. He, being thickheaded, is regarded as a fool, for his lack of penetration, while Mrs. Nannicantipot is a everybody's friend, and her behavior is nothing but self-contentment itself. Therefore, it is natural that her song should be criticized by Quid, Blake. Then, Quid(Blake)begins to sing the original poem of "The Little Boy Lost" :

O father father where are you going
 O do not walk so fast
 O speak father speak to your little by
 Or else I shall be lost
 The night was dark & no father was there

And the child was wet with dew
 The mire was deep & the child did weep
 And away the vapour flew

This song has a dark and sad tone, though afterwards, it is included in *Songs of Innocence*. And it is never radical like a song *Experience*. The three poems commented above, are all songs sung as the theme of children, but they are not always sung for children. The Quid sings of a sad figure of a child losing his way in the forest. This "forest" is a satirized symbol of the City, London. Quid is singing his song more ironically than anybody else. He is by his name the cynic. If the 'cynic' is used in *Songs of Innocence*, *Innocence* is not written only for young children. We can always find the mood of *Songs of Experience* behind the poems of *Innocence*.

Thus, the three poems preceding *Songs of Innocence* show the aspects of *Experience* as well as auguries of *Innocence*.

An Island in the Moon is lacking in a part of its manuscript. The reasons may be classified into three: 1. Somebody stole it away. 2. Blake's wife or friends lost it, after Blake gave it to her or them. 3. Blake himself lost it. It would have been too careless of Blake to have given somebody his original manuscript. Therefore, we can reject 1 and 2. No.3 can be sub-classified into two. One is that Blake lost it carelessly. The other is that he lost it intentionally. The ending of this *Island in the Moon* is the most interesting scene:

"—them Illuminating the Manuscript."
 "Ay," said she, "that would be excellent."
 "Then," said he, "I would have all the writing Engraved instead of Printed, & at every "other [word del.] leaf a high finish'd print—all in three Volumes folio—& sell them a hundred "pounds apiece. They would print off two thousand."

In this conversation, 'he' and 'she' are not clear, because the previous part has been lost. However, this is supposed to be a conversation of Quid (Blake) and his wife (Catherine). Blake touches upon his 'Illuminated Works,' which

might be composed after this *Island in the Moon*. His speech, “-then Illuminating the Manuscript...” is no less mysterious than the missing of *Ur-Hamlet*. Perhaps, after Blake had written the way how to draw his Illuminated writings, he deleted it from the *Island in the Moon* lest that his technique should be stolen by anybody else. Nowadays, we can not, indeed, comprehend his technique, even if an expert. After all, it is because Blake concealed the lost manuscript somewhere.

And above all, it is most significant that *An Island in the Moon* implies the same poems as those of *Songs of Innocence*. *An Island in the Moon* is regarded as satirical literature. But, if this work is understood as mentioned above, it is Blake's basis by which he made his name in the world as a poet, as well as a painter. He was, so to speak, a painter, a poet, a novelist and a dramatist. In Chapter 1, Inflammable Gass's word, “Your Reason” was considered as a word corresponded to Urizen, one of Four Zoas who is a persona of “reason” in Blake's Prophetic Works. Blake's idea in *An Island in the Moon* precedes that of his later Prophetic Works, while the Characters of *Island* have great potentialities to play conspicuous parts in his later writings.

Note

- (1) Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry – A Study of William Blake* --(Princeton University Press, Fourth printing 1974) P.191.
- (2) Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* p.191.
- (3) Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire* p.178
- (4) *ibid.* p.179. cf. Damon's *Blake Dictionary*: “IMAGINATION” and “INTELLECT” p.195,197.

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