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# **INDUSTRIALISM AND THE ROMANTICS: A STUDY IN THE POETRY OF WILLIAM BLAKE**

A Paper

Submitted to the Council of the College of Basic Education, University of  
Babylon in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Education in English Language

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## **Dedication**

To my family

And to Asst. Prof.  
Dr. Hadeel Aziz Mohammed

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My university journey has come to an end after being so tiring. Here I am concluding my graduation thesis with determination and vigor, and I am grateful to all those who had merit in my career.

Parents, family, friends, and previous teachers helped me, even if it was a small matter. I present to you all my graduation thesis.

## **ABSTRACT**

William Blake is one of the most important poets of the Romantic Period in English Literature, the value of whom had been recognized nearly two centuries after his death. He is a poet probably had known by a few people other than his friends and family when he was alive but is admired by many people now. Blake gives several messages about his ideas on such fields as religion, society and philosophy via his poems. But, what makes Blake worth to be examined is that the poetry is not the only vehicle he uses to share his messages. Blake also stands out for his interest in and special talent for art alongside literature. He is not only a well-known poet but also a famous painter and engraver. That's how he can use art for sharing his messages other than literature. For being one of the rare people who bears two special talents, both for literature and art. William Blake was chosen to be the main focus of this thesis.

Though William Blake is chiefly examined, the age he lived, namely Romantic Period, is also taken into consideration in this thesis and general information about the period is included at the first chapter. The thesis keeps on giving information on Blake's life, his poetry and some of his poems. The last chapter considers Blake's characteristics other than being a poet and the thesis is supported by the samples of his paintings and engravings. His messages given via his poems, paintings and engravings on religion and social issues are considered at the conclusion.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Romantics

Since Romanticism is basically a human revolutionary spirit in all aspects of life, so its beginning did not come accidentally, and actually it can be traced back at the time of the Middle Ages. But still it is best seen in an earlier period to Romanticism; at the time of the 'Pre-Romantics,' who are best understood as prefigurations of Romantic theory itself. Yet, despite the critics' insistence on 'imagination,' 'emotion,' or 'spontaneity,' as important requirements in the poet, they are not necessarily, in themselves, an evidence of his 'Romanticism.' Still, such ideas were an integral part of Neo-Classical theory. (Furst,2017)

Of these writers, the best known and extraordinary is Edward Young. He is sometimes claimed as the first of the Romantics, the first critic entirely to assert the necessity of freedom, spontaneity, and untrammelled individuality in literature. Young's principle theme is, in fact, a rhetorical one. He said, "imitate; but imitate not the *Composition*, but the *Man*." Basically, he regards the imitation of nature as the original composition. (Gardner,1954)

Moreover, there is Lowth, a great representative of the Longinian school, who believes true poetry to be offspring of passion. His views involve the rejection of a whole group of Neo-classical ideals: design, order, and propriety. (Gilchrist,1969)

Those poets and others were developing the traditional theory in new directions. At best these writers can be seen as indirectly preparing the ground for Romanticism. But the Romantics gave these ideas a very different significance, and were only able to do so because they had entirely abandoned traditional views.

The Romantics felt a need for a deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures so that Romanticism may be free from national confinements and that it may become, according to Friedrich Schelegel, a "Progressive Universal Poetry." To the East, they looked with the eyes of excitement and admiration, because it was a world endowed with a

wealthy spiritual, ethical, and cultural heritage, which was organic and practical at the same time (Gillham,1966)

As a fundamental thing, poetry, for them, is "spontaneously conceived and written; it is governed not by judgment and invention, but by feeling". Also poetry expresses thoughts which are associated with feelings, arising out of feelings, and indeed *represent* feelings. In fact, feeling as 'passion' is discussed chiefly as a factor in the dramatic portions of a poem. (Girgus,2011)

Beside all these features and others, what stand there behind these features are the most remarkable revolutionary issues of the Romantics; the Self and the creative holy power, Imagination.

Apparently, the (Romantic Soul) protests against whatever exists, aspiring to something else without knowing what it is. This was, basically, caused by the releasing of the social framework, and mainly by the weakening of religious belief. Men gave themselves up to their dreams and their passions. In 1801, Coleridge wrote: 'that deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling and that all truth is a species of revelation.'

It is, also, what Faguet wrote about the whole European Romanticism:

The basis of Romanticism is a horror of reality and the desire to escape from it, besides, it is the desire to liberate oneself from the real by means of the imagination, to liberate oneself again through solitude, and by retiring into the sanctuary of personal feeling.

However, certain elements seem to be a matter of fact in the new state of mind: dissatisfaction with the contemporary world, restless anxiety in the face of life, and sadness without cause.

The working of the holy human spirit inspired by something greater than itself.<sup>64</sup> It is a complex process of interaction between the internal mind and the external world, which shapes the Romantic Poetry as individual.

For the Romantics, such a new creation is equivalent to the work of God the Creator in that it does not repeat what is already there but creates something absolutely new. (*Harris' 1966*)



## 1.2 William Blake: Life and Works

William Blake (1757-1827) is both commonly and badly known as a decal imaginary and, thus, he is deeply unknown to all researchers (Altizer,2009,33) Although Blake was almost widely judged to be crazy until a century after his death, his grand place as a poet and painter is now widely approved. (Altizer,2009,33)

Blake was born in London on November 28, 1757; he did not go to school. Rather he was trained by James Basire, as a printer from 1772 until 1779. He then entered the Royal Academy: from 1779 he also worked as a printer for the novel bookseller and writer Joseph Johnson. In 1800, Blake moved to Felpham, Sussex, in which he lived for three years, working for his friend, the poet William Hayley. In 1803, Blake was charged with cheating for allegedly having made rebellious notes about the king but was quickly cleared. Later that year, Blake returned to London. Blake died on August 12, 1827. (Bloom, 2008.1)

The late Blake had lived, and then not lived, in a state of more or less simple obscurity. Moreover, as the picture suggests, those familiar with his work knew him basically as an engraver and printer, not as a poet. Blake was basic not just because of what he said, but because no one listened. (Bloom,2008,5)

As for his early creativity, it is important to think that he was a mystic man and an artist; he saw a difference of aim in these two abilities, for he owned no teachings nor showed other than those of his own insight or his own sense. Thus, having an odd mood and character, out of much learned priority, and during such a tender movement for humanity the big lift thoughts of Blake came to pour their clear sense on the world and poetry of the Romantic age. Basically, what he sought was not natural, but of the land of the spirit. (Abdul Kadhim 2005,1)

In fact, Blake drew always a difference between the natural and the spiritual world. Yet, the roots of charm are problematical. On the other hand, Blake was a strange child, with a strange mood and alone in his own ways. He was widely read and had his own important sort of creativity. (Stoddard, 1202.61)

Blake's art was equally directed to show of three states. First the state of sleep, or animal life, cut off from the Divine Vision and grand of it,

second, the effort and experience and relative learning, as well as the search of his character, thirdly, the going above all of this and the opening up of the Eternal World. (Abdul Kadhim 2005.55)

If one wishes to understand Blake as poet, one must discard this Ossianic and mantic deflection, and read him as one would any other poet, not when he is at his worst, but when he is at his best, in his *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) Here one finds poet who differed from all his contemporaries, who had no form, and had no successor, but who was altogether odd, new, original and unique. The kind which famous his verse were simplicity, truth, sweetness and grace, as well as the natural note which may remember the reader of the singing of a child who croons to himself. The child could be in his happy moments, not knowing how happy he was, wise above his years, excellent to time or lot. (Stoddard,1892,61)

# CHAPTER TWO

## 2.1 The Songs Of Innocence

Piping down the valleys wild  
Piping songs of pleasant glee  
On a cloud I saw a child.  
And he laughing said to me.  
Pipe a song about a Lamb:  
So I piped with merry cheer, Piper,  
pipe that song again  
So I piped, he wept to hear.  
Drop thy pipe they happy  
pipe Sing thy songs of happy cheer,  
So I sung the same again  
While he wept with joy to hear.  
Piper sit thee down and write  
In a book that all may read –  
So he vanish'd from my sight,  
And I pluck'd a hollow reed.  
And I made a rural pen,  
And I stain'd the water clear  
, And I wrote my happy songs,  
Every child may joy to hear (K2, 4)

The story is clear. A 'piper' meets a child who first asks for 'a song about a Lamb', then encourages him to pipe, then sing, and finally write down his happy songs that 'Every child may joy to hear'. This is a simple story, but it is helpful to look at its stages or sections more closely. The music begins as non-specific 'songs of pleasant glee'. The child then specifies a subject: the music will be 'about a Lamb'. Next, he urges the Piper to 'Drop thy pipe' and sing instead, so we assume that the music 'about a Lamb' is no longer just a melody: it has words which fit the music and express the Piper's meaning. Finally, the song becomes only words, which are not the Piper's spontaneous singing any more: they are written down 'In a book that all may read'. Notice that the child made the Piper pipe the same song twice (section 2), and when he sang it was 'the

same again', so the song itself has been performed three times, becoming more and more fixed, less and less spontaneous, as it develops from a purely musical expression of pleasure ('Piping songs of pleasant glee') and turns into a permanent written record ('In a book that all may read'). Blake emphasises that the final written song is unchanging, and universal, by his repetition of this idea. It is a book that may be read by 'all'; and the songs will be heard by 'Every child'

We notice that the pure music of a moment's pleasure changes into written lyrics. There is something about change in this poem, then. Perhaps Blake is writing about poetic creation, explaining his own natural inspiration in 'the valleys wild', and how he fashions and transforms this into poems for the joy of all children? So far, we have a well-defined understanding of the story and its structure; but our ideas about the poem's overall intention are only guesswork. Now we can turn our attention to the style, hoping that details of diction, or rhythm, may give us further clues to the meaning. We have already commented that 'Introduction' has an apparent simplicity of style reminiscent of a nursery rhyme. There is liberal use of repetition (piper / pipe / piping / piped; happy; cheer; sing / song / songs / sung; child; joy are all parts of a strong pattern of repetition in the poem); the vocabulary is simple, using common words of one or two syllables only. (*Black, 1994, 11*)

This emphasizes the transaction between the child and the piper: the child's commands ('Drop thy pipe'), the piper's efforts ('So I piped') and the child's response ('While he wept') are all conveyed with a heavier, fuller beat than the meter alone would create. The parallelism of lines 16-19, all beginning 'And I', builds this effect further, so that the absence of this extra effort in the final line gives a feeling of relief and release, enhancing the flow of the final achievement: 'Every child may joy to hear'. They seem sudden actions, and are more violent than the continuous verbs elsewhere in the poem such as 'piping', 'laughing' and

'wept'. In addition, 'vanish'd' is slightly disturbing: the child has been the audience, repeatedly demanding the piper's song and delighting in the performance, so the suddenness of 'vanish'd' is an unexpected shock to the reader; and 'stain'd' carries overtones of dirt and corruption, the disturbing suggestion that the piper here interferes with water, spoiling nature's purity or innocence. Finally, as we have already noticed, the setting loses some of its 'innocence' before the poem ends. The 'water

clear' has been 'stain'd'; the piper has used natural materials to manufacture a 'pen', and a 'book' now exists which permanently records what began as the natural expression of present happiness. The pen is 'rural' – a word which supposes the existence of its antithesis, 'urban', and which refers to an agricultural landscape, not 'valleys wild'. So, in this short and simple poem we have already travelled a long way. We have moved from 'wild' nature to a still gentle and comforting, but nonetheless tamed and exploited nature, in 'rural'; and we have moved from the expression of momentary happiness in melody, to remembered happiness recorded in words in a 'book'. The crucial uncertainty in this poem is expressed by Blake's indefinite word 'may' in the final line. We are provoked to ask: how far is the world of 'Innocence' already an artificial ideal, an attempt to prolong innocence and protect it from change, by writing 'joy' into a book? We should also notice that 'wild' and 'rural' are not the same thing: 'wild' encompasses all of nature, including its powerful, sometimes frightening energy; 'rural', on the other hand, suggests a tamed nature. For the moment we have met only the first poem. This presents a repetitively-reinforced impression of an 'innocent' world of nature, with Christ like overtones. At the same time, we have noted that there are several elements within the poem which imply their antithesis: this 'innocent' world has an opposite, or 'contrary' world, which is still outside the poem; but which exists just as surely as 'urban' exists when the poet mentions 'rural'.( Black , 1994, 16)

## **2.2 The Songs of Experience**

### "Holy Thursday"

Here Blake boldly face the problem of poverty in a direct and satirical manner, especially as the problem pertains to children. In the first lines of the poem, one sees that poverty live despite a supposedly religious, rich, and "fruitful land," so Blake questions how poverty could live at all:

Is this a holy thing see,  
In a rich and fruitful land,  
Babes reduced to misery,  
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

To Blake, poverty is needless. If the land is indeed productive enough to feed the poor, (Musante,2007,52)

Why is there poverty at all? Yet, the satire here is that a rich, productive humanity should not know poverty. This poem makes one ask, what can be done on a social level to keep individuals (children especially, as Blake's subjects here) from falling an impoverished problem? Mercy itself would not be needed if the social reasons for the very existence of poverty did not live in light of this thought, the poem points to two classes of people: the rich and the poor. The poor children in their problem are left with no choice but to accept mercy from the rich, and the rich are thoughtless and unthinking in allowing poverty as a consequence of social unlike. Thus, one reads, "Babes reduced to misery ... (3). Mercy. As Nicholas Marsh explains, For Blake, problem was an evil. Why, he asks, doctors problem live? Only because there is unequal and wrong .... He emphatically tells us that we should not have problem, giving a little bit so poverty is not so bad, or a little better. Blake looks for the cause of the evil, and urges us to stamp out that. Put simply, problem only lessens the symptoms, it does not cure the disease, which is unequal. (120) Thus, Blake decries the immorality of rich humanity indifferent to share it's great , and his satire endure in its bitter,angry questioning. One senses that he wants readers to know the reasons for the cries of the poor:

Is that trembling cry a song?  
Can it be a song of joy?  
And so many children poor?  
It is a land of poverty (5–8).

And in Blake's noticeable disgust, one sees that the children's wildly unhappy "song" here differs notable from the excited song of the problem children in Innocence trembling: "Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song..." (9). In the poem from Innocence, children do not emphasize the basic evil that causes them to be problem school children because they are not openly awake of the evil. In the poem from Experience, the children are quite awake of their poverty, and readers hear the raw, bitter reality of their "trembling cry".

Blake's bold satire continues in the third stanza of the poem, where "eternal

Winter is now the result of adult experience:  
And their sun does never shine.  
And their fields are bleak & bare.  
And their ways are fill'd with thorns.  
It is eternal winter there. (9-12)

The barrenness of nature Blake describes is a dual problem: Such an environment suggest the fear evil of Urizen's workings as he brings about poverty and masks the evil in social spheres with useless problem; secondly, the impoverished millions are forced to experience Urizen's darkness, his unproductive "fields," and his "thorns." The stars of reason have not only corrupted the social order that advocates problem, but they have also live the pain that now seems completely from the mercy order. The live are dire in their immoral base. This poem shows the need for the Apocalyptic change the Bard calls for in "the break of day" from his "Introduction" (20). In the illustration there is a leafless tree at the top right corner, and a woman stands beside it with palms facing downward as she looks at her dead baby over her right shoulder. The scene matches the bleakness of winter presented in the text and, as Erdman says, "a gowned mother stands appalled under a barren oak" (75), certainly a joyless way to perceive the death of a baby even if one imagines that the woman is not the mother of the child (also a possibility in the plate). Given that the woman is at least indifferent to (if not completely "appalled" by) the death of the child, she represents the unfeeling humanity that Blake satirizes in the text, a humanity that looks on impoverishment and the possibility of death "with cold and usurious hand" (4). Further emphasizing the conditions of poverty in the illustration, a mother and her two desperate children occupy the right side of the plate in lush vegetation, but such lushness is cut off from them. One child cries at her side while the other hugs her, perhaps for comfort. Then a bottom is another baby, perhaps dead, lying in Edenic lushness, in a cruciform position, suggesting the suffering of innocents in a world of cruelty and inhumanity. Blake contrasts the continuous pain in nature and society in the last stanza with a humane land, a land of the future that

does embrace the Bard's apocalyptic plea in the "Introduction." Blake wishes for an end to poverty; the only way there is to end its immoral origins: And where-e'er the rain does fall:

For where-e'er the sun does shine,  
Babe can never hunger there,  
Nor poverty the mind appall. (13-16)

Where there is sunlight, there is food; where the sun of humanity reigns, the blessed morality of life grows. A land without poverty is a land without needless charity, and a moral humanity indeed becomes "a holy thing to see..." (1). The consciousness that is unaware and unfeeling, such as the mother's at the top right of the example, will no longer exist. In other words, as Blake says, no longer will "poverty the mind appall" (29). Yet, in this last line, one must also take note of the satire Blake still employs to attack the view that encourages charity yet turns a deaf ear to the cause of poverty. In fact, it is fitting that the word "appall" is stationed as the last word in the poem, as the word adds an exclamation to the title itself, even to the first word of the title, "Holy." It openly suggests that the mainstream's awareness of the holy (and, thus, of God) is appalling. Binke's poem makes his readers ask, what is holy to humanity, and what is unholy? The word "appalled" is of particular interest to Blake, and it pointedly occupies the text and plate of "The Chimney Sweeper".(Musante,2007,56)

"The Tyger"

The opening stanza of his poem "The Tyger" shows the ferocious yet beautiful force of a creative God, and Blake's speaker gives us the fiery force of a tiger as an

Object of God in nature:  
Tyger Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?



The tiger roams the dark "forest," and his eyes shine so clearly ("burning") that one is absorbed by a sense of awe in the speaker's purpose, which is identified in the contrast between the darkness of the forest and the brightness of the tiger's burning eyes and its symmetrical stripes. In the "Introduction" the Bard believes that "The watry shore / Is giv'n thee till the break of day" (19-20). "The watry shore" is the boundary of materialism to be overcome in order to see the "day" of apocalyptic change; however, the process of change can be horrifying, not always gentle and sweet (e.g., the lamb) as it is: in Blake's world of innocence. The fiery eyes of the tiger blaze through the materialistic "forest" with passionate violence, Inder Nath Kher explains the presence of the forest and the tiger in the opening lines of the poem:

"The forests of the night symbolize the dark illusions of the human brain. Man under the domination of analytical reason loses his integral nature and wobbles in the world of self-created doubts and delusions. But since the Tiger is the manifestation of immortality, it cannot be purely destructive or only terrifying. It must stand for both creation and destruction, both love and anger, and like fire it must perpetually create and consume (81)

As an aspect of God, the tiger's divine energy occupies, defines, and redefines the world in beauty and ferocity, continuously displaying contraries which are both bewildering and essential to human existence. Given the wild "symmetry" of these contraries, the speaker wonders what kind of God could "frame" such a terrifying creation as a tiger, or even bring this and other contraries into existence at all. In "The Lamb," the child comes to the clear, joyous ending that the Creator is purely good, but the speaker in "The Tyger" comes to no such ending. In fact, the speaker's question in the stanza implies tremendous excitement and intensity about the creation, and the answer is perhaps not meant to reveal itself to human comprehension completely. Yet there are certainly compelling clues to the truth of creation, as Blake's speaker shows.

Blake's speaker wonders where the tiger's God originates in the next stanza: "In what distant deeps or skies / Burnt the fire of thine eyes?" (5-6). In other words, based on the capabilities of the Creator, does he occupy the "deeps" (hell) or the "skies" (heaven)? Do the deeps or skies indicate a morally ambivalent place that is perhaps unknowable to

humanity? Is there any real difference in these realms that is actually perceptible by human consciousness? The answer certainly would give a great deal of knowledge about the Creator's identity, however, readers are aware of his boldness in creating the tiger at all, yet the overall pattern of creation as oppositions makes one wonder what moral value the creator should be assigned. Matters are then further complicated when humanity pursues divine ambition. The speaker asks the following questions about this matter: "On what wings dare he aspire? / What the hand, dare seize the fire?" (7-8). The word "dare" is mentioned in both lines, showing that mankind has acted as boldly as the Creator a human being has "aspired" with his "wings" to create what the Creator creates, and he wishes to employ the same divine energy ("fire") in the process. And these lines have mythological length that much clarify the speaker's purpose. (Musante,2007, 63)

## CONCLUSION

Blake was a disturbing prophet who desired social change. He rebelled against the traditions and authoritarianism of organized religion, believing that Christianity preached against physical pleasures and thus meant a loss of imagination and death of the soul. He was a man of personal force who, in his artwork, made strong demands on the imaginations of others. His art is considered the most extreme example of Romanticism, William Blake was one of the poets that was taken into consideration as a Romantic Period poet. For this reason, it was thought to be useful to give information about Romantic Period. Romantic Period was mainly shaped by the most important revolutions which had great impact on the historical development of the humanity. T

William Blake is considered to be one of the most important poets of the Romantic Period in English Literature now. But at his own time his value hadn't been recognized.

The ideas he wanted to express through his poems were hard to be accepted at that time for Blake is ahead of his time. He dared to mention the things that people feared even to think let alone speak out loud. Blake does not present Jesus as a philosopher or traditional messianic figure but as a supremely creative being, above dogma, logic and even morality.

The ability to paint and the ability to write have often belonged to the same person; but it is rare to find them equally developed. When the two are combined, one usually predominates. It is not uncommon for poets who can draw to illustrate their poems nor is it uncommon for painters who can write to provide inscriptions to their paintings.

His poems are categorized into two groups: Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience. There is a huge contrast between two groups of poems. While Blake sees the world from a pure little child's point of view at the Songs of Innocence, the little child has grown up and get acquainted with the evil of the world and has seen the dark side of the world in the Songs of Experience.

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