

# **British Romantic Poetry: The Industrial Revolution Ignored?**

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Bachelor's Thesis  
2020



**Tomas Bata University in Zlín**  
Faculty of Humanities

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Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně

Fakulta humanitních studií

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Akademický rok: 2019/2020

## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Veronika Káňová**  
Osobní číslo: **H16739**  
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**  
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**  
Forma studia: **Prezenční**  
Téma práce: **Britská romantická poezie: Průmyslová revoluce ignorována?**

### Zásady pro vypracování

Shromáždění sekundárních materiálů k tématu  
Nastudování vybraných primárních děl  
Formulace cílů na základě informací ze získaných zdrojů  
Analýza zvolených primárních děl  
Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **Tištěná/elektronická**  
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

**Seznam doporučené literatury:**

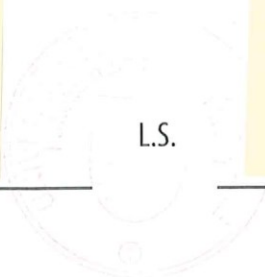
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Roe, Nicholas. *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2005.  
Wordsworth, William. *Poems, In Two Volumes*. London: Oxford University, 1807.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Ewald Mengel**  
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **8. listopadu 2019**  
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **11. května 2020**



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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce pojednává o britské poezii psané v době industriální revoluce, konkrétně v letech 1760 až 1840, kdy tyto změny úzce souvisely s literárním hnutím romantismu. Práce se zaměřuje na to, jak industriální revoluce ovlivnila literární díla básníků žijících v Anglii. Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat básně autorů této doby a zjistit, zda svou nespokojenost či souhlas pro kapitalistickou společnost, promítali ve svých dílech, či nikoli. Jako analyzovaná díla jsou v bakalářské práci uvedeny básně od autorů Williama Blaka, Williama Wordswortha, Johna Keatse a Percy Bysshe Shelleyho.

Klíčová slova: *britská poezie, romantismus, industriální revoluce, industrializace, urbanizace, William Blake, Londýn, vykořisťování, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Jezerní básníci*

## **ABSTRACT**

This Bachelor thesis deals with the topic of the Romantic Poetry in England during the Industrial Revolution, and it covers the period between 1760 and 1840. More specifically, the thesis deals with the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the literary works of the poets living and writing at the time. The aim of the thesis is to analyse poems and decide if the poets themselves expressed their opinions on the capitalistic society through their writings, or not. The poems analysed in this bachelor thesis are by William Blake, William Wordsworth and John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Keywords: *British Poetry, Romanticism, Romantic movement, Industrial Revolution, industrialisation, urbanisation, William Blake, London, exploitation, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lake Poets*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Acknowledgements, motto and a declaration of honour saying that the print version of the Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of the thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical, worded as follows:

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## INTRODUCTION

The Romantic Movement formed as a reaction against the Enlightenment rationalism as far back as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and it continued until the '30s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its beginnings can be traced back to Great Britain, right after the year of the French Revolution (1789) and coincidentally, right after the *Songs of Innocence* by William Blake was published. Whilst the British rebelled against the strict rules of classicism, the commencement of Romanticism in France resulted from people's revolting with their libertarian ideals against the government.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the authors were looking for moderation and liberty in their lives so the term 'romantic', which usually evokes love and tenderness, could have sometimes been interchanged with the word 'sensibility'. The term itself however, was coined approximately a century later, so none of the authors would consider themselves as romantic at that time.<sup>2</sup> Some of them reacted against the sign of sensibility as they felt it was their responsibility to either comfort the human soul through their verses, or warn the readers about their personal or public worries. Romanticism itself has contributed to the development of a vast range of fields, primarily arts such as poetry, visual arts and music. Last, but not least, Romanticism played a significant role in the attempt to change the whole nation's mindset.<sup>3</sup>

The first generation of romantic poets, the so-called 'Lake Poets', living in the Lake District, consists of William Blake (1757 – 1827), William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834), Robert Southey (1774 – 1843) and Charles Lamb (1775 – 1834). The second generation includes names such as George Gordon Byron (1788 – 1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822) and John Keats (1795 – 1821). Most of these poets died at very young age of either illness, suicide, or accident, which was very common at that time. And in a way, the tragedy behind their passing had helped to strengthen the romantic ideals and after the death they were worshipped by other representatives from this movement. These authors helped to guide others during the period of change; they ventured into new territories, both literally and metaphorically, and inspired people to do the same. The artists expressed their feelings, opinions, ideals, issues, and concerns both implicitly and explicitly.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Roe, *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Whether intentional or not, the impact of the Industrial Revolution does reflect in their work. Industrialisation was developing approximately at the same time as the Romantic Movement. According to some economic definitions, it is the process of change when the country's economy is transformed from traditional agriculture into one based on the manufacturing of goods in more modern forms.<sup>5</sup> New technologies such as the steam engine, the water frame, the spinning jenny or the coke blast furnace, which increased the use of coal even more, had made the work easier and more efficient. As a result, the coal was incredibly cheap and had become the new source of energy. As the value of labour and wages were high, these new types of machinery were quickly adopted in Britain as an effective way of substituting people and of course, such investments resulted in government savings as well.<sup>6</sup> The new appliances also guaranteed immediate prosperity such as the accumulation of capital, the growth of income, agricultural surplus, or improvements in transportation, which helped to expand to overseas markets. The factories increased the labour force and improve workers' skills, whose cravings for better living conditions led them to bigger cities (such as London, Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool), a process which consequently resulted in rapid urbanisation. During the economic boom, new universities were built to strengthen national education, particularly within the engineering field. The University of Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, or Bristol were built from red bricks, which reminded one of the buildings of factories. On the other hand, the universities for arts and humanities like Oxford and Cambridge are made from more natural and older material called sandstone. After all, the North of England had always been more industrial while the South remained agrarian, with the exception of London.<sup>7</sup>

Despite many benefits brought by the Industrialisation, there had also been an undeniable negative impact on many workers, who had suddenly found themselves disposable. In northern cities, new cotton mills were installed; machines had replaced workers such as weavers or tailors as they were no longer needed.<sup>8</sup> In 1812, the radical group known as the 'Luddites' destroyed the weaving machinery as a way of protesting against the new system. That had sparked another wave of strikes and riots of dejected people across various industries. William Blake's famous remark on 'these dark satanic mills' echoes the criticism of capitalist

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce F. Johnston, "Agriculture and Structural Transformation in Developing Countries: A Survey of Research," *Journal of Economic Literature* 8, no. 2 (June 1970): 369, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2720471>.

<sup>6</sup> Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Ferber, *Romanticism*, 98-9.

<sup>8</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 19-21.

practices (e.g. philosopher John Locke). The horrors of these practices would emerge later in other literary works such as *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, published in 1854.<sup>9</sup>

During the Industrial Revolution, working conditions were the worst for the middle-class and for children. Women and children did not have many work opportunities, and they were very often left with no choice but to make ends meet by doing menial jobs. The child labour was not new since the children helped their parents in the fields. They started to work in the early mills, mines, and manufactories, like the adult members of the family, which meant less focus on schooling. Households whose children had attended schools had higher incomes than other families that had to send children to work. Only when the wages began to rise, children could stop working and they would have a chance to focus on their education. Having said that, the shift from domestic to factory production was not devastating just for the children. The usual working hours would be 13 hours a day, six days a week with the exception of Sundays. The workplace did not often meet the requirements of health and safety and some tasks were believed to be more suitable for children as they could squeeze into smaller spaces. Consequently, children would work as chimneysweepers in factories where the coke was burnt. They could sweep the narrow spaces and long chimneys with their nimble fingers unlike the adults.<sup>10</sup>

As the factory workers earned more money, most families had moved to towns while those who stayed behind, such as farm labourers in the countryside, started to feel the impact of poverty. It was rather common for children to work in local labour markets because the families' possessions – a farm or small business started to decline. At that time, many new goods on the market, such as coffee, tea or sugar, were addictive, which increased their consumption. With the high demand for such goods, children would become a very cheap labour force. Those addictive substances made the relationships between adults and children even colder and worse.<sup>11</sup> Not every child lived with his/her biological parents; many of them were orphans who would live either with foster parents or in almshouses, and hardly ever found understanding or sympathy in the cold relationships.

Air and water pollution often caused various types of deadly diseases – the defective sewage system had helped to spread cholera, tuberculosis, typhus or influenza. Moreover, the poor

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<sup>9</sup> Ferber, *Romanticism*, 98-9.

<sup>10</sup> Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-9, 26, 32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-3.

nutrition of children had contributed to it, too, as well as the deformities of skeleton which were caused by the improper workplace. Children would experience the danger of such work environment the most; there had been many machinery-related accidents risks of poisoning due to exposure to raw materials. Doctors used to treat patients with toxic potions of mercury, iron, arsenic or use of other methods such as bloodletting or leeching.<sup>12</sup> All these conditions had also contributed to low life expectancy – just 37 in London. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the nation's population failed to grow due to a very high mortality rate: the Great Plague contaminated large parts of London.<sup>13</sup> However, after the year 1740, the population rose dramatically as the industrialisation had contributed to the improvement of health care and the birth rate would double every fifty years then. One of the contributions could have been electrification in factories in the early 1880s. For instance, the electric lighting helped to reduce fire hazards and eliminated the heat and pollution caused by gas lighting due to earlier lack of any ventilation.<sup>14</sup>

The Romantic poets lived during the times of significant cultural changes, which had an impact on their work. The young artists welcomed and supported the ideals introduced by the French Revolution however, as the Revolution carried on, many of the authors would eventually abandon such ideals.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that the Industrial Revolution as such is not the focus of their work, one cannot deny its influence when analysing their poems in more detail, as some explicit or implicit references to the Industrial Revolution are indeed present. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Scott were the leading figures of the Romantic Movement. Wordsworth himself would face few dilemmas; firstly being optimistic about French revolution which later brought disappointment by the political events, especially after the coronation of Napoleon Bonaparte (1804). Together with Coleridge, they turned back to the Anglican Church and became increasingly conservative. Even though it suggests that they rejected politics in favour of nature and rich inner life, both of them followed the social and political debates furthermore.<sup>16</sup> Wordsworth, inspired by Greek mythology, stated that inanimate objects have a life, almost a personality, and Coleridge was looking rather for liberty

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Kirby, *Child Workers and Industrial Health in Britain, 1780-1850* (New York: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2013), 5, 14.

<sup>13</sup> L. D. Schwarz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, labour force and living conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 83.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Wong, *Post-Punk Perception: Living in the Social Milieu* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2013), 131-4.

<sup>15</sup> Ferber, *Romanticism*, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Ferber, *Romanticism*, 96.

in forests and seas than ‘in the forms of human power’.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the second generation of poets, which came after 1810, was more committed to liberal and revolutionary principles. Since they did not witness many failures and betrayals of Revolution and their morality was not affected, all three, Byron, Shelley and Keats rejected organized Christianity. None of them ever accepted the idea of Christ the Redeemer, but at the same time, every one of them would look up to God with high respect and wrote about Him in poetry with reference to the Bible and *Paradise Lost*. Byron, mostly influenced by Milton’s work, admitted that no social transformation is possible without forgiveness and compromise. Each of the younger poets, like their predecessors, played with the idea of a fallen state of man. The flaws of man are represented by the sin of pride, absence of love for others and separation from people. Byron’s biggest concern is the suffering bound to the human condition, whilst Shelley’s ‘principle of self’ is worshipped by all. Finally, Keats suggested that the most important burden of life is to escape from ‘the self’. The possible ways of achieving it can be by joining the union, communion or entering marriage, which is outside ourselves – basically the escape from the centre of our consciousness as he describes in his most famous poem *Ode to a Nightingale*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> J. Douglas Kneale, *Romantic Aversions: Aftermaths of Classicism in Wordsworth and Coleridge* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1999), 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Bloom, *English Romantic Poetry* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 101-3.

## 1 WILLIAM BLAKE

William Blake is considered to be the first Romantic poet as appreciation and glorification of nature can be found in his writings. He was born in Soho (London) to James and Catherine Blake on November 28, 1757 and christened at St. James's church on December 11. As a second child of a quite prosperous shop proprietor on Broad Street, he would soon stroll along those busy streets. Despite being born in the city, Blake would rather saunter along much quieter streets of London and growing older, his fondness of wandering the country and its rural areas would grow with him. He would also never miss the chance to visit museums or art galleries. Blake was homeschooled by his mother until the age of ten. After that, he attended Mr. Pars' drawing-school, the preparatory school for juvenile artists. He would teach himself how to draw figures by copying antique models of the Gladiator or Hercules. At around the age of eleven, he wrote his first collection of blank verses that were published when he was 26. As it was extremely difficult to make a living by being a painter, the fourteen-year-old William was apprenticed in the shop of an engraver, Basire. He learnt skills such as etching and engraving and he would eventually work there for several years.<sup>19</sup> Blake married Catherine Boucher in 1782 and stayed together until Blake's death. In 1785, Blake and Catherine moved out of London with Blake's younger brother Robert, who had contracted tuberculosis at the age of 24. Blake looked after him until Robert's death in 1787. After his brother's death, Blake and his wife returned to London, the place mentioned in almost each of Blake's work, where Blake with Catherine lived very modestly with little money always seeking employment till the age of 69 and 70. Nevertheless, William was productive until the end of his life. His most intellectual and mature works appeared through the progress of the revolution. As Roberts summarizes:

He suffered no early bereavements, never joined the army, never left England, never went to university, never went on the Grand Tour, did not have a string of failed relationships or lovers, didn't take opium, wasn't in France during the Revolution, fathered no children, never became famous during his own lifetime, worked steadily at his profession to support himself and his wife, and died peacefully in old age.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake* (New York: Dover Publications, 2017), 5-15.

<sup>20</sup> Roberts Jonathan, *William Blake's Poetry: A Reader's Guide* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 1-21.

## 1.1 *London*

This poem is a part of Blake's *Songs of Experience* (1794) and it reflects Blake's disapproval with industrialization, the power of authorities, business monopolies and harsh living conditions. Despite his fondness of London, proving that by moving away and turning back to the city, Blake felt rather frustrated by its atmosphere at that time. One of the issues frequently addressed in his poems are the degradation of London's inhabitants, the "blackening" smoke of factories, beggars and prostitutes in the streets.<sup>21</sup>

1 I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.<sup>22</sup>

In the first stanza, the narrator wanders the streets near London Bridge where the River Thames flows, and shares his impressions of places he sees. He suggests that the city is under control of someone or something as the word "chartered" indicates. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word means a 'grant' or guarantee of rights, a franchise or sovereign power of a state or country.<sup>23</sup> Having said that, there is an ambivalence in the word 'chartered' as it not only expresses the limitations of freedom but, according to the other definitions, it may also mean giving 'permission'. Exploring the latter, it suggests that London streets were open to the public but at the same time owned by private businesses, so they were no longer public properties. The regulations and laws had restrained its use so the monopolies could control commercial interests.<sup>24</sup> The Revolution started as an attempt to preserve the ancient law, but modern liberties were granted to French people, proving once again that King John's Magna Carta "was nothing more than a re-affirmation of the still more ancient standing law of the kingdom". As Thomas Paine wrote, "Every chartered town is an aristocratic monopoly within itself, and the qualification of electors proceeds out of

<sup>21</sup> Annika Bräuer, *The Representation of London in William Blake's "London" and William Wordsworth's "Composed upon Westminster Bridge"* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2010), 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> William Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience* (New York: Dover, 1992), 36.

<sup>23</sup> "chartered," Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chartered>.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Berkebile, "A Study in Songs: Comparative Analyses of 20th century settings of William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience: selections from Vaughan Williams's Ten Blake Songs, Britten's Songs and Proverbs of William Blake, and Rochberg's Blake Songs: For Soprano and Chamber Ensemble" (DMA diss., West Virginia University, 2017), 86.

those chartered monopolies.” And surely Blake saw as much charters as Paine and his narrator is disconcerted from every face he meets and sees the “Marks of weakness, marks of woe”. Therefore, when looking at Blake’s work, one simply cannot ignore the historical and socio-economic context in which it was written.<sup>25</sup>

2 In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

3 How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appals;  
And the hapless Soldiers sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls<sup>26</sup>

The first three verses in the second stanza start with an anaphora “In every” which emphasizes the omnipresent desperation. Additionally, the word “cry” which carries a negative connotation here, evokes the sense of melancholy as the speaker observes the city. By the sound of “mind-forg’d manacles”, one can understand the restrictions people willingly accepted by being part of the system that controls them. The man is ‘handcuffed’ in the prison of his own mind.<sup>27</sup> The capitalists forced people to work on low salaries so they could keep the low-cost production going and Londoners had no other choice but to accept the job. The other group of people dependent on the labour were migrants from the rural areas, who ironically moved to London to earn more money.<sup>28</sup> In the third stanza, Blake moves further to another cry, which is the one of children forced to work at an early age. There is a specific connection between the church and a monarchical state; both institutions would tolerate child labour. The word “blackning” also vilifies the church itself, as the institution is usually associated with purity and security, not blackness and fright. The verb “appals” stands for fright or outrage. The criticism continues in verse “Runs in blood down

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<sup>25</sup> Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse & Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 49.

<sup>26</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 36.

<sup>27</sup> Berkebile, “*A Study in Songs*,” 86-7.

<sup>28</sup> Issabel Mustika Ajeng Rianto, “*INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN “LONDON” BY WILLIAM BLAKE,*” (Undergraduate thesis, Diponegoro University, 2016), 7-8.



the Palace walls”, which refers to the bloodshed of a soldier – the blood running down the Palace walls that represent the government and its policy. Moreover, the government is dependent on human sacrifice in wars for defence of a state.<sup>29</sup>

4 But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.<sup>30</sup>

The social criticism goes further with the last stanza. Blake brings to reader's attention the problem of prostitution and the position of women and children in the society at that time. There is use of stronger language such as “blasts,” “blights,” “harlot” or “hearse” reflecting on the nightlife of London. The words try to make the reader feel disgust about the situation. The expression ‘youthful Harlots’ indicates a person of a young age, possibly even a child, prostituting herself as the only way of making money. At that time, it was usual for women to be dependent on their husbands’ income. However, in the event of their husbands’ death, they would find it rather difficult to get a respectable job and were left with little or no choice other than prostitution.<sup>31</sup> Blake describes a young prostitute delivering a child infected by a contagious disease. She transmits the disease on her infant child, the husbands who use her and consequently to the husbands’ wives as well. Therefore, it is not only her being punished, but also all the men who would pay for her services. Blake could also denote on moral decadence of people spreading the disease into their marriages, which notes that the relationships were based on duties and expectations rather than on mutual love.<sup>32</sup> Blake brings to our attention the everyday struggle of the lower class that have been forgotten and exploited. He would portray the picture of children forced to work, soldiers to battle by order of authorities and women despised by society and yet abused by respectable men while their wives look away. He also places the poem within the context of the Industrial Revolution and wants the public to become conscious of equal rights and self-awareness.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Berkebile, “*A Study in Songs*,” 86-7.

<sup>30</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Rianto, “*INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN “LONDON”*,” 23.

<sup>32</sup> Berkebile, “*A Study in Songs*,” 87-8.

<sup>33</sup> Rianto, “*INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN “LONDON”*,” 24.

## 1.2 *The Tyger*

Another poem from the collection *Songs of Experience* is *The Tyger*. It consists of six quatrains with rhyming couplets, of which the first and the last stanza frame the poem except for the words “could” and “dare” interchanged. Throughout the poem, Blake contemplates the creature’s existence and its creation. The speaker wonders about what a tremendous power (symbolized by an “immortal hand”) it took to bring this “burning bright” animal to existence. One way of understanding the symbol of a tyger in the poem can be the ongoing revolution of industry. If that is the case, the narrator does not necessarily need to be Blake himself. However, Blake’s intentions might again be to show the negative impact the industrial revolution had on society.<sup>34</sup> There is a huge variety of symbols used, for example, the tiger’s striped fur might remind the reader the of flames used for factories’ activity. The tiger might symbolize creation, transformation or destruction, which can be, once again paralleled with the Revolution. People used to work in redbrick factories, which had long brightly lit windows that could be compared to the flaming stripes of the tiger’s fur. People would wake up early in the morning and went to work before the sunrise, so they would walk in the darkness or gloom (“in the forests of the night”). Not only does the tiger live in the jungle, but also the people who, in their own way, live in the industrial jungle of modern cities. Another way of understanding the symbol of the tyger itself can be a representation of the dark side of a human soul walking at night as if one would be dreaming. Despite the initial comparison of the tiger to the “deadly terrors”, the speaker changes the tone when talking about the “fearful symmetry” that is symbolizing the furiousness and beauty of the animal’s natural symmetry. At the end, he describes the tiger’s divinity and compares it to the origin of lamb.<sup>35</sup>

- 1 Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
  
- 2 In what distant deep or skies.

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<sup>34</sup> Joseph X. Brennan, “The Symbolic Framework of Blake's “The Tyger”,” *College English* 22, no. 6 (March 1961): 406-7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/373911>.

<sup>35</sup> Martin K. Nurmi, “Blake's Revisions of “The Tyger”,” *PMLA* 71, no. 4 (September 1956): 669-670. [doi:10.2307/460637](https://doi.org/10.2307/460637).

Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?

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

4 What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp,  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!<sup>36</sup>

The poet, fascinated by the Tyger throughout the entire poem, uses metaphors such as “Burnt the fire of thine eyes” or “The Tyger, burning bright”. With each stanza, the speaker asks more and more intense questions which helps to build an atmosphere of thrill and horror. One of the questions asks to name the source of the fire that could either come from the hands of the Devil (from the deeps) or from God himself (from the skies). Despite asking those questions, the speaker is aware that he will not get answers. Then the poet moves to the physical description and characteristics of the all-powerful creator with the mention of the body parts such as “shoulder,” “heart,” “brain,” “hand” and “feet”. The “dread hand” and “feet” repeatedly show the reader the tiger’s dreadfulness, which is then strengthened by the following stanza ending with ‘dread grasp’.<sup>37</sup> Since the imagery of blacksmith and forge is dominant, Blake inspired by *Paradise Lost* emulates Miltonic imagery throughout the whole poem. In Book I of *Paradise Lost* occurs a man with huge “shoulder,” and “knee” – “a giant famed as a worker of iron” and the Milton’s “art of Hell is practiced by devils at their flaming forges”. Then, Blake refers to the thoughts of Belzebub in Book II, where the Devil asks “what strength, what art can then / Suffice”.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 32.

<sup>37</sup> Nurmi, “Blake’s Revisions of “The Tyger”,” 675-8.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Miner, “Blake’s “Tyger” as Miltonic Beast,” *Studies in Romanticism* 47, no. 4 (Winter, 2008): 479-505, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/223460974?accountid=15518>.

5 When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

6 Tyger Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?<sup>39</sup>

Blake's shift of mood from the active visualization to more detached observation is shown in the fifth stanza. There is a presence of judgement in the verse "Did he smile his work to see?" when the poet questions God's work. Finally, the speaker expresses his desire to appraise the almighty creator and asks the central question; did he make the lamb, such tender and cute animal as well as the ferocious tiger?<sup>40</sup> The use of symbols in Blake's works represents the prophecies and this particular poem might indicate that there is an apocalypse occurring in cosmos. The lines mentioning the stars and spears are thought to be an allusion to Book VI of *Paradise Lost*: "They, astonished, all resistance lost / All courage, down their weapons dropt.". Milton described the fall of Satan from Heaven and the stars weep the 'pearls of dew'.<sup>41</sup> The similar echoes can be found in other works written by Blake, for example in *America: A Prophecy*, the weeping appears several times and it stands for an accomplishment comparable to the creation of a tiger. Ultimately, the Miltonic equivalent of the tiger can be the militant Christ, and for the lamb the one of the merciful Christ.<sup>42</sup>

It has been mentioned that the immortal hand symbolizes the creator's power as similarly as the human hands had to be strong enough to manage all the technical inventions brought by the Industrial Revolution. However, the immortal eye stands for the mysterious mind needed to invent them so therefore, both skills are essential.<sup>43</sup> As mentioned earlier, the first and the last stanzas, with swapped words of ability ("could") and courage ("dare"), are framing the poem. There, with the word "Dare" comes the real climax of the poem. The last two lines

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<sup>39</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Brennan, "The Symbolic Framework of Blake's *The Tyger*," 406-7.

<sup>41</sup> Miner, "Blake's *Tyger* as Miltonic Beast," 479-98.

<sup>42</sup> Nurmi, "Blake's Revisions of *The Tyger*," 671-4.

<sup>43</sup> Brennan, "The Symbolic Framework of Blake's *The Tyger*," 406-7.

are the call and cry of fascination at how God could allow the horrors of industrialism to happen, compared nearly to an apocalypse.<sup>44</sup>

### 1.2.1 Comparison to *The Lamb*

The two poems, *The Tyger* and *The Lamb* are each other's counterparts, both describing different views on the act of creation. Both poems show the reader the comparison of very simple contraries, such as good-bad, moral-immoral, heaven-hell, God-Satan.<sup>45</sup> There are two sides of the human soul – the Lamb therefore represents the state of innocence, the Tyger the state of experience. Blake believed that a person has to go through both states to reach a specific level of self-awareness. His vision is deeply involved in the universe where the supernatural force struggles with making a balance between those two themes. The speaker asks the same question – “Little Lamb who made thee” with a much softer touch than in a verse from *The Tyger* “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” when questioning whether both creatures, one harmless and the other harmful, have one possible creator.<sup>46</sup> The symbol of a lamb had been used in the Christian traditions since the time of Revelation as these innocent and loveable creatures were often sacrificed in religious rituals.<sup>47</sup>

### 1.3 *The Chimney Sweeper* (1789)

William Blake wrote two different poems of the same title, both dealing the issue of children working in bad conditions. He criticizes the destructiveness of child labour, then the society and mainly, the Church.<sup>48</sup> Back in Blake's times, there was an annual tradition when six thousand uniformed children from all London charity schools had to assemble in St Paul's Cathedral to sing hymns and hear a sermon while standing on specially erected stands. The public perceived this established practice of charity as a magnificent act of generosity. Blake describes the children's conditions and experiences from the city in poems *Holy Thursday* and in *The Chimney Sweeper* where the children are portrayed as little angels.<sup>49</sup> Even though

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<sup>44</sup> Nurmi, “Blake's Revisions of “*The Tyger*,”” 680.

<sup>45</sup> Robert F. Gleckner, ““The Lamb” and “The Tyger”- How Far with Blake,” *The English Journal* 51, no. 8 (November 1962): 538, <https://doi.org/10.2307/810419>.

<sup>46</sup> Cengage Learning Gale, *A Study Guide for William Blake's “The Tyger”* (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2015), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Mary R., Rodney M. Baine, “Blake's Other Tigers, and “*The Tyger*,”” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15, no. 4 (Autumn, 1975): 565-6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450011>.

<sup>48</sup> Karakuzu, Melih and Özlem Sayar, “A Comparative Analysis of the Conditions in the Romantic and Victorian Ages and their Reflection in the Poems “The Chimney Sweeper” (1789, 1794) by William Blake and “The Cry of the Children” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning,” *Cogito* 8, no. 4 (December 2016): 105-109, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1902612840?accountid=15518>.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Davis, *William Blake: A New Kind of Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 44.

the image of a child mostly represents innocence and purity, children in this poem deal with blackness – they needed to be heard and needed to know they were still capable of love despite their darker skin; soiled from the soot of the chimneys. The child is waiting for the Angel who will set him/her free from the “locked-up coffins” to Heaven (the act of purgatory) where their skin will be whitened, and the soul purified.<sup>50</sup>

1 When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry “weep! ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!”  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.<sup>51</sup>

When reading the first two lines, the reader learns about a child being sold to Master sweepers by their poor parents. Having said that, the child-parent relationships in families were often broken and unhealthy at that time. Moreover, children were not considered equals and their welfare was, therefore, not a priority during those times. When looking at the poem within the historical context, it becomes clear that children were very often abused and taken advantage of by those closest to them. In this poem, the child is sold by his father as an inanimate commodity for money. That raises the question of why a parent would act like an insensitive man towards his own child. The father let the child earn money even though he knew it was his responsibility, not the child’s duty.<sup>52</sup> Not taking into account the income of the family, some historians have found that eighteen-century parents were vilified in the treatment of children but only did what was considered appropriate in the past. Some others concluded that the parents of working-class send children to work by reason of their selfish unwillingness to work or greed for buying consumer goods.<sup>53</sup>

When reading the verses “And my father sold me while yet my tongue could scarcely cry “weep!” “weep!” “weep!” “weep!”, one cannot help but notice the similarities between the word ‘weep’ and ‘sweep’. Children would very often wander the streets of London, shouting ‘sweep’ ‘sweep’ when looking for work. In this context, it becomes obvious that the child sold by his father is so young that he can barely say the word ‘sweep’. However, we can also look at the absence of the sibilant as being intentional, so when little Tommy wanders the

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<sup>50</sup> Leo Damrosch, *Eternity's Sunrise: The Imaginative World of William Blake* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), 62-65.

<sup>51</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Karakuzu and Sayar, “A Comparative Analysis of the Conditions in the Romantic Ages,” 105-9.

<sup>53</sup> Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, 32.

streets, shouting ‘sweep’, all the reader is left with is ‘weep’ so he/she then become the witness of his suffering. The last verse reveals how the boy sleeps in the soot, which he then cannot wash off. The soot often caused many illnesses and working inside tiny chimneys caused the lifelong deformity of spines or limbs.<sup>54</sup>

2    There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
      That curled like a lamb’s back, was shaved, so I said,  
      “Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s bare,  
      You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”<sup>55</sup>

In this stanza, the character of a little boy whose head is shaved – similarly correlated to a soldier entering the army for the first time signifies taking one’s freedom away. The boy’s hair is curly, similar to lamb’s wool, so the correlation between the lambs being shaved for wool and the boy’s head being shaved is present. However, the main reason for shaving Tom’s head is that “the soot cannot spoil his white hair”.<sup>56</sup> Tom Dacre is one of Blake’s most known characters, appearing in more of his poems. Speaking about the historical context, Lady Anne Sackville as a widow established Lady Dacre’s almshouses between James Street and Buckingham Road. It was a charitable housing for twenty poor persons, men and women, ten of each sex, and a school for the orphans where Tom could have belonged.<sup>57</sup>

3        And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
          As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!  
          That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,  
          Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

4        And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
          And he opened the coffins & set them all free;  
          Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,

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<sup>54</sup> Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, 10-11.

<sup>55</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Stanley Gardner, *The Tyger, the Lamb, and the Terrible Desert: Songs of Innocence and of Experience in Its Times and Circumstance* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 114-5.

<sup>57</sup> Stanley Gardner, *Blake's 'Innocence' and 'Experience' Retraced* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 67-8.

And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

- 5 Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.<sup>58</sup>

In the following stanzas, his fellow sweepers named Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack are already lying in the black-coloured coffins, meaning their entrapment in a state of poverty and exploitation. However, in Tom's dream, all the suffering will be swept away by washing the bodies in the river and then leaping in the sun. Again, there could be a Biblical reference to purification and salvation, which is necessary to go through before entering heaven. In Blake's poem however, it is rather ironic, as Blake himself did not believe in the afterlife.<sup>59</sup> This vision suggests that the Angel who promises a 'better life' will free all the boys one day. At the end of the dream, Tom is truly 'happy' which could be a cheerful escape from the difficult realities. An antithesis between the blackness – the death ("coffins of black") and whiteness – the rebirth (shine of the Sun and the promise of an afterlife) works as visual imagery in many stanzas, too. After having been washed, they stayed naked without bags of soot and clothes, which indicates the distraction from any material stuff and being disengaged from their burden of working.<sup>60</sup>

- 6 And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Damrosch, *Eternity's Sunrise: The Imaginative World of William Blake*, 65-6.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew Leporati, "William Blake's Perspectives: Teaching British Romanticism in the Community College Classroom." *College English Association Critic* 78, no. 1 (March 2016): 90-105, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cea.2016.0003>

<sup>61</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 9.



There are two contradictory environments – the dark and cold one, which should represent the period in Britain and the other, the warm and the bright one as the children were supposed to live happily. Even though Tom wakes up again to the harsh reality, he feels happy and warm with the possibility of the afterlife.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the poem, the narrator denotes the portrayal of the actual situation and summarizes the circumstances with the plain statements of facts, without any emotive coloration (for example “my father sold me” or “we rose in the dark / And got with our bags & our brushes to work”). On the other hand, Blake offers some words of encouragement when comforting Tom (“Hush, Tom! never mind it”). The use of the conjunction ‘so’ brings the inevitable consequences of the children’s fate.<sup>63</sup>

### 1.3.1 Comparison to *The Chimney Sweeper* (1794)

The full name of the first poem is *The Chimney Sweeper: When my mother died I was very young* published in *Songs of Innocence* in 1789. The other was published five years later in *Songs of Experience* and it is called *The Chimney Sweeper: A little black thing among the snow*. While the first collection is written from the perspective of an innocent child and childhood is connected with joy, hopes and high expectations, the other one represents the opposite – the adulthood is formed by experiences as the progress of a human soul. The poems characterise the fears of poverty and war and the repression of social, political or religious institutions. Blake never commented on which state of being is better – he believed that both are important in forming the human soul and keeping it in balance. As a result, most of the poems are other’s counterparts, (the Chimney Sweepers and Lamb – Tyger). Both collections are sometimes compared to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, when the innocence represents ‘paradise’ and experience the ‘fall’ of humankind. The first poem rather vividly describes the religious hopes while the other harshly criticises the Church and God with the lack of belief. Grim criticism of society and its relationships, religion and bad working conditions also depict the pessimistic atmosphere and the impact of the industrial age. Even though many of the Romantic poets were radical Protestants, Blake believed that truth was in *the Bible* so he refers to an Angel who sets the boys free when he tells Tom that “He’d have God for his father” if he behaves well.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Katja Gummesson, “*The Chimney Sweeper – A Stylistic and Allegorical Study*” (Undergraduate thesis, Halmstad University, 2011), 9 -12.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Marsh, *William Blake: The Poems* (London: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2012), 110.

<sup>64</sup> Gummesson, “*The Chimney Sweeper*,” 9 -12.

- 1 A little black thing among the snow:  
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!  
Where are thy father & mother? say?  
They are both gone up to the church to pray.
  
- 2 Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smil'd among the winters snow:  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.
  
- 3 And because I am happy & dance & sing,  
They think they have done me no injury:  
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,  
Who make up a heaven of our misery.<sup>65</sup>

The boy is crying “weep, weep, in notes of woe!” and complaining about his parents who left him alone, as they would rather go to church. The boy says, they “gone up to the church to pray”, similarly to the poem of *Innocence*. Furthermore, the speaker seems to be more mature because the poem only contains one exclamation mark emphasizing the suffering, while in the first poem there were exclamation marks after every interjection/verb ‘weep’.<sup>66</sup> His parents sold him so he could work as a chimney sweeper, and he says “clothed me in the clothes of death”, which clearly shows that his fate is fixed and he is most likely to die. The poem reveals the failures of social institutions that are meant to protect the children, such as the state, the church or the family itself. Blake believes that anyone can change society and he tries to encourage people through his verses. He was strongly convinced it was the duty of us all, not only the King’s or Priest’s. In the last line of the poem, one man’s loss continues in one man’s gain that could mean children often had to pay with their lives. For example, the angel arriving with a bright key could represent people taking their responsibility and changing the situation. Blake also wanted to convey a moral message – how poverty changes society and how wealthy people are profiting from the child labour. According to Blake, the church and the King accepted the child labour with their eyes shut as the rich people’s wealth

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<sup>65</sup> Blake, *Songs of Innocence; and Songs of Experience*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> Leporati, “William Blake's Perspectives,” 90-105.

would gradually increase, while the working-class would suffer. The irony is that young children will always listen to what the adults say to them and they will hardly ever take actions to change society. It is also worth mentioning that during the reign of King George III, any public expression of disagreement against the King was punishable by law and it could have sometimes led to execution. There had also been charges raised against Blake, accusing him of writing rebellious poems, but he was never found guilty.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Gummesson, “*The Chimney Sweeper*,” 43-5.

## 2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Wordsworth was born in 1770. He and his four siblings lost their parents 8 years later, in 1778. After that, all children were sent off to different schools. ‘William had to go to Hawkshead school where his soul was enriched mainly with books and nature. In the late teen age and early twenties, every time he went hiking, he explored the local landscape with poetry in his hands.’ During his stay in France in 1792, he had a passionate affair with the French woman, Annette Vallon and he had an illegitimate daughter as a result. Supposedly, he took care of her when in her teen age and supported her financially so she could marry anyone. As Wordsworth spent time in France during the French Revolution, it had influenced his political stance and upon his return to England, he began to look for political parties that were more conservative. The turning point of his life was a reunion with his sister Dorothy (also an English author) with whom he stayed very close for the rest of his life. In 1802 (after his return from France), William immediately married a short-story writer Mary Hutchinson and they, together with Dorothy, settled down and lived in the Lake District. However, it was not easy to make a living by being a published author, so the family would struggle financially as a result. William sought new sources of inspiration in the Lake District area. The district, sometimes called ‘the Lakes’ or ‘Lakeland’ is still being visited by many tourists these days, and it has dozens of beautiful lakes that attract nature lovers and romantics, so it is no wonder that the Lakeland poets and other writers would find this area to be a perfect source for inspiration. Wordsworth himself found a great deal of inspiration for his famous poem ‘I wandered lonely as a cloud’ there. Coincidentally, there was another Romantic poet living next door to Wordsworth – Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The neighbours would soon become great friends, but sadly, Coleridge introduced him to alcohol consumption and opium. Spending lots of time together, it is not a surprise that they both had influenced each other’s work. They worked together on *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1801. Later, the circle of friends and secret admirers grew bigger as Wordsworth worked more and more on his own collections of poems. Suddenly, he would prioritize his work over anything and anyone else, such as his loved ones and friends. One of his five children described him as ‘yearly less of the Poet, and more of the respectable, talented, hospitable Country gentleman.’ William lived quite happily and died in 1850.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Sven Birkerts, “Wordsworth: From Poet to Country Gentleman,” review of *William Wordsworth: A Life*, by Stephen Gill, *Chicago Tribune*, July 16, 1989.

## 2.1 London, 1802

Wordsworth's political sonnets of 1802 were written during the Peace of Amiens, which was the treaty between France and United Kingdom, signed in the city of Amiens. However, it lasted only for a year before it was broken. After that, Wordsworth returned to France, probably to visit his daughter. He also continued collecting his impressions on the pathetic state of France in the year 1802 and then juxtaposing them with the initial ideals of the French Revolution, because he had spent some time in France while the Revolution raged. After returning to London, he expressed his overall disappointment with the capital's decay and affairs and the consequences of the French Revolution as the earlier goals had been lost.<sup>69</sup> The depiction and comparison of both countries are published together in a collection *Poems, Two In Volumes* (1807), which was the first publication since *Lyrical Ballads*, and *London*.<sup>70</sup> Specifically, the poem is a Petrarchan sonnet, which is usually subdivided into two parts – an octave of two quatrains, each consisting of four lines that follow the embracing rhyme (a b b a; a b b a) and a final sestet of six lines corresponding to “c d d e c e”. Almost the entire poem is written in iambic pentameter; however, in some lines, he uses trochees to stand out from the typical pattern. Wordsworth's main reason for writing that poem was to express his discontent with the English society and its contemporary issues to which he tried to find a potential saviour. The other part of six lines indicates a glorification of John Milton and the speaker finds Milton to be an answer to the problematic situation of the Englishman. Regarding the form of the poem, there is an intertextual reference to John Milton who as he himself wrote in the Petrarchan sonnet (*On His Blindness*). Wordsworth was inspired and influenced by Milton's work, similarly to Blake, as he shows in this poem, which can as well be called ‘Ode to Milton’ as the speaker is begging John Milton to come back from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to bring England to life. The speaker states that England is in danger in terms of political and social issues and describes the country as a “fen of stagnant waters” – a state riddled with corruption, standing and stagnating without any moves forward. In fens once

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<sup>69</sup> Stephen C. Behrendt, “Placing the Places in Wordsworth's 1802 Sonnets,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900* 35, no. 4 (Autumn, 1995): 641-667, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450758>.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Cronin, “Wordsworth's Poems of 1807 and the War against Napoleon,” *The Review of English Studies* 48, no. 189 (February 1997): 33-40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/519129>.

we can find warty toads, which can remind us of the politicians from various parties or corrupted business proprietors. Wordsworth sees no future in moral progress. That is why the country is being at a standstill, so he asks Milton for help.<sup>71</sup>

- 1 Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
- 2 England hath need of thee: she is a fen
- 3 Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
- 4 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
- 5 Have forfeited their ancient English dower
- 6 Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
- 7 Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
- 8 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.<sup>72</sup>

The speaker immediately starts with an apostrophe of Milton, while adding an exclamation mark at the end. The potential saviour is missed right ‘at this hour’, most likely because of the ongoing Industrial Revolution and war with France. Even though the capital is not mentioned within the poem at all, apart from its title, it triggers readers into thinking of his/her personal associations of London. However, those associations as such, stand for the entire country and Wordsworth personifies it in the verse “England hath need of thee; she is a fen / Of stagnant waters”. Suddenly, the country becomes mortal, just like a human being, and according to Wordsworth, it is a crisis of patriotism and Milton being alive again would prevent it from its decay. The following synecdoche (when a part represents the whole thing) is mentioned multiple times throughout the poem – the ‘altar’ represents church and religion, and a ‘sword’ stands for war (most likely the ongoing war with France) and the military. The ‘pen’ covers the government responsible for corrupted politics and insufficient education and from a different point of view the demand for new and extraordinary authors in literature, while the ‘fireside’ as a place of gathering family members, can represent safety. The crisis of moral values and Wordsworth’s criticism of the society becomes obvious in the verse ‘We are selfish men’ thus they see no importance in having enriched inner life and soul with

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<sup>71</sup> Hans Niehues, “Analysis of William Wordsworth's “London, 1802”” (Essay, Ruhr University of Bochum, Munich, 2014), 3-6.

<sup>72</sup> William Wordsworth, *Poems, In Two Volumes* (London: Oxford University, 1807), 139.

right-ordered priorities or moral code. Moreover, the speaker (Wordsworth) considers himself as a part of such society (“We are”), society that is responsible for the situation and realizes he himself might have done something wrong or even worse – might have done nothing at all to improve the situation. Ultimately, the inhabitants replaced the “inward happiness” for the superficial material things. In the seventh verse, there is another emotional exclamation to draw reader’s attention “Oh!”. The phrase “raise us up, return to us again” is a reference to *Paradise Lost*’s verses “what is low in me, raise and support,” asking for God’s help. Milton here represents the virtue, a moral excellence that is demanded from him in the last verse of this octave. Wordsworth seeks manners, virtue, freedom, power that England had lost and Milton should bring those qualities back. The manners are set of rules and principles of etiquette, which secure proper behaviour and the virtue represents ethics and moral codes that many people of upper class (the employers and men of law) had lost. Sadly, the lower and middle classes suffered from losing their power and freedom due to the upper class and aristocracy that took these ideals away. Since Milton is already dead, he cannot bring the values back and Wordsworth is aware of it; he knows he cannot bring him back to life literally but at least he can do so through his poems.<sup>73</sup>

9 Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:  
 10 Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
 11 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
 12 So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
 13 In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
 14 The lowliest duties on herself did lay.<sup>74</sup>

The entire final sestet is dedicated to John Milton with many similes used, such as comparing his soul to society’s star guiding light that the political navigators should follow and bear as an emblem of the moral and cultural heart. The sound of the ‘murmuring’ sea is comparable to an English voice singing to Liberty, and the verse “Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free” notes that Milton’s moral character is pristine and that he abides neither the rules nor social conventions.<sup>75</sup> Milton is compared to “the naked heavens” and that places him right between the Earth and the universe. Therefore, juxtaposing stars and sea seems to be making

<sup>73</sup> Niehues, “Analysis of William Wordsworth’s “London, 1802,” 4-6.

<sup>74</sup> Wordsworth, *Poems, In Two Volumes*, 139.

<sup>75</sup> Behrendt, “Placing the Places in Wordsworth’s 1802 Sonnets,” 641-667.

a connection between the universe and the Earth. The technique of bringing two opposites together to emphasize their contrast was commonly used within Romantic poetry. Furthermore, the poet admires the uniqueness and differences between each individual, similarly to Wordsworth's respect for Milton as he puts him on a pedestal. There is a frequent usage of the consonant 's' in lines 9 and 10, which creates euphony when read aloud. The fact that Milton is said to travel "in cheerful godliness" brings him closer to God than any other preacher as the church lost its connection to God. The last phrase "thy heart / the lowliest duties on herself did lay" reveals the emotional connection to England and its importance for Wordsworth as it is again personified, and the duty lays on him. By the "lowliest duties", we may understand the messages that poets send to society – the minor duty of being a writer is to warn the community about social issues and wrongdoings. Wordsworth suggests that the state needs a proper citizen who will bring new ideals, not a celebrity like Milton who functions just as an example of a noble character.<sup>76</sup>

There is a connection here between the French soil where Wordsworth stayed while writing the poem, and the British shores that were his homeland. The sonnet unravels the importance of specific places as the English Channel literally links the two countries together, in a way it links the disconnected Wordsworth in France with his motherland. According to some authors, Wordsworth's trauma lay in his inability to accept the switch that changed Britain into the "bulwark of liberty compelled to war against an imperialist aggressor that had betrayed the French Revolution's ideals". He presents himself as a patriot who renounces his previous sympathies with the Revolutionary France, and in a way, his loyalty to England may be demonstrated by his rushed marriage to Mary Hutchinson. Wordsworth juxtaposes these two countries repeatedly throughout his writings. Another example of that is in the memorable poem *The Prelude*, where he portrays Robespierre as a negative public figure responsible for the Revolution while presenting Milton as a moral high ground when resisting Napoleon's battles against England.<sup>77</sup> Thus, he was not disappointed with the crisis in 1795, when the French tried to preserve a democratic state, but rather with England entering the war with France.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Niehues, "Analysis of William Wordsworth's "London, 1802," 4-6.

<sup>77</sup> Behrendt, "Placing the Places in Wordsworth's 1802 Sonnets," 641-667.

<sup>78</sup> Paley, *Apocalypse & Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*, 185.



### 2.1.1 Comparison to Blake's *London*

While both writers criticized the dark era of industrialisation, the rise of capitalists and the ongoing war with France, Wordsworth's view seemed to be more positive. One of the reasons might be the fact that he focused on the destiny of the whole country, which he believed Milton was going to redeem. He, just like Blake, speaks about Londoners abandoning old values and says that the harm and damage need to be changed by returning to those values, which he believes Milton represents, to bring the lost 'inward happiness' back.<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, Blake's attitude is more cynical and rather negative. Blake feels deeply for the people who are living in poor conditions and who are struggling with physical and mental health problems. His major focus is on tackling these social issues, and he does so by his depiction of crying children working as chimneysweepers, misused by their parents and other authorities. Both of the poems should awake everyone, specifically the Englishmen, who should reconsider what is needed, and support the desperate and helpless. One of the common features of Romantic poetry is the criticism of urban life, which the two poems deal with, too. The purpose of writing the poems is the unification of England with God and Country under the notion of 'Nation'.<sup>80</sup>

### 2.2 *I wandered lonely as a cloud*

Wordsworth spent most of his life in the Lake District, where he acquired enough inspiration for the poem, published in 1807 in *Poems, Two In Volumes*. It may not be that obvious when reading the poem, but he implicitly criticises capitalism again and he speaks about a gained wealth of the state. Similarly, in the poem *London*, "the pursuit of economic advantage is identified with spiritual loss" and seeing that England had always belonged to one of the wealthiest and most active economies in the world, the loss is, therefore, inevitable. The rich country hides the fields full of 'golden daffodils', just like the golden coins are concealed in safes of national banks. Wordsworth wants to inculcate justice and fairness in people by stating that 'the most profitable investments' are those that give you the ability to see the truth with the help of the 'inward eye' in exchange from the outside world. Wordsworth is aware of the state's 'debt' – the inability to follow the ethical norms; what he means is that the world of nature that enriches the mind and soul is traded for the 'commercial exchanges' and to him, it is something useless and uninteresting. He also believed that people lived in

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<sup>79</sup> Niehues, "Analysis of William Wordsworth's "London, 1802," 4-6.

<sup>80</sup> Behrendt, "Placing the Places in Wordsworth's 1802 Sonnets," 641-667.

the superordinate world of high economic value rather than in the imaginative one. Having said that, it almost feels as if he tries to ignore it and reveals to readers his world throughout the poem.<sup>81</sup>

1 I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.<sup>82</sup>

The speaker describes a spring day, which he spends by walking alone in the fields of daffodils, dancing in the breeze. The whole poem is full of personification, the description of flowers and nature and with no mention of any materialistic objects. He personifies almost every piece of natural phenomena and compares himself to the solitary cloud floating high up in the sky.<sup>83</sup> The use of alliteration is frequent in this poem, particularly the repetition of the consonant 'l', which appears in first two lines ("lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o'er vales and hills"). Simultaneously, the use of dark vowels such as 'a', 'o' and 'ou' that creates the calm rhythm of the floating cloud is used, too. However, the turning point of the poem comes after the phrase "all at once", as the tension increases with the climax of the poem. Furthermore, the use of commas and semicolons makes the reader feel as if he/she is left in the middle of a sentence and yet within the narrative speed.<sup>84</sup>

2 Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,

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<sup>81</sup> Cronin, "Wordsworth's Poems of 1807 and the War against Napoleon," 35-50.

<sup>82</sup> William Wordsworth, *Wordsworth: 'Daffodils' and Other Poems* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 2016), 97.

<sup>83</sup> Cengage Learning Gale, *A Study Guide for William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"* (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016), 6.

<sup>84</sup> Simon Wortmann, *The longing for transcendence in William Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud"* (Munich, GRIN Verlag, 2011), 1-4.

Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.<sup>85</sup>

There are remarkable features of transcendence in the poem that stand for everything what is beyond – beyond of what is known, represented, or experienced by humankind.<sup>86</sup> More specifically, it is a process of getting beyond what is considered normal and physically familiar. Wordsworth reaches into an area that is more spiritual and the second stanza takes place in the cosmic dimension when the multitude of daffodils are compared to the stars twinkling in the galaxy. The speaker estimates that there are ten thousand of them, which demonstrates the unbelievable scale of infinite nature. The words ‘continuous’ and ‘never-ending’ reinforce the idea of infinity. The speaker craves for peaceful environment where he could reach a specific level of self-discovery and consciousness as the word ‘wandered’ might suggest – he is lost and yet, the hope springs eternal. There is a desire for freedom with flowers all around him, but he believes that freedom can only be found in the mediation of transcendental experience into the spiritual sphere. The daffodil, the most important image of the poem, has the colour of gold, which makes it even more valuable and attractive and simply looking at it gives the narrator a profound joy. The important message lies in the metaphor ‘Tossing their heads in sprightly dance’, which assumes that even a simple organic plant like a daffodil possesses feelings. In simple terms, the motif of dancing expresses happiness of life, which the narrator found in ‘glance’ of beauty from the sublime experience.<sup>87</sup>

- 3 The waves beside them danced; but they  
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
 A poet could not but be gay,  
 In such a jocund company:  
 I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
 What wealth the show to me had brought:
- 4 For oft, when on my couch I lie  
 In vacant or in pensive mood,  
 They flash upon that inward eye

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<sup>85</sup> Wordsworth, *Wordsworth: 'Daffodils' and Other Poems*, 97.

<sup>86</sup> Regina Schwartz, *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2007), 7.

<sup>87</sup> Wortmann, *The longing for transcendence*, 1-4.

Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.<sup>88</sup>

The speaker gets very emotional in his description of dancing flowers as he sees the waves dancing in glee (“The waves beside them danced; but they / Out-did the sparkling waves in glee”). The repetition of the verb ‘gazed’ suggests the speaker’s overwhelming delight of the whole situation. The narrator here goes through four emotional stages – first comes excitement (after spotting the daffodils) and then the thoughtfulness, caused by the scenery. The third stage is pure joy as he realizes how happy he is watching the daffodils dance and finally, becomes conscious of the experience.<sup>89</sup> He is so impressed by the emotional density of nature that he does not fully comprehend how exceptional this experience is. He wishes to escape from solitude because he feels sorrowful. Ultimately, whenever he feels lonely, the simple thought of daffodils makes him happy and “his heart fills with pleasure” as the vacant and pensive mood is gone, so the whole poem evokes peacefulness. Despite the speaker comparing himself to the lonely cloud, he is situated “in such a jocund company” – the company of nature and therefore, he is not abandoned. In fact, the poets considered nature to be a living ‘thing’, as the omnipotent God, who had put the soul into every stone or tree, created the universe.<sup>90</sup>

One way of looking at the poem is a celebration of nature and all its wonders. However, Wordsworth glorification of ‘golden fields of daffodils’ might implicitly serve as a rejection of industrial society, as the speaker finds meaning and profound joy outside of the city, in looking at something as ordinary as a daffodil. Furthermore, when he stops ‘wandering lonely as a cloud’ and finds himself back on his couch, it is not the industrial world and all its advantages that put him at peace; it is a simple thought of those ‘dancing’ daffodils. To sum up, the poem can be considered as a rejection of the developed industrial environment. Additionally, there is a reference to the ongoing war with France, which took place on the British Isles. Wordsworth has addressed many social issues in his writing at that time. He does so implicitly, so it might not always be apparent when reading the text for the first time. However, when looking under the surface, one can feel the emotionally charged narration

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<sup>88</sup> Wordsworth, *Wordsworth: ‘Daffodils’ and Other Poems*, 98.

<sup>89</sup> Wortmann, *The longing for transcendence*, 1-4.

<sup>90</sup> Victoria Dutschk, *Romantic Thoughts in Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud”* (Munich, GRIN Verlag, 2009).

and the author's frustration. On the other hand, Wordsworth, similarly to the other romantic artists, would often find the state of tranquility in ordinary things, such as going for a walk. They shared a positive attitude on the Industrial Revolution by creating thoughts and images from everything that was modest.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> "William Wordsworth And The Industrial Revolution," Bartleby, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.bartleby.com/essay/William-Wordsworth-And-The-Industrial-Revolution-PKTGYCNTYSEPP>.

### 3 JOHN KEATS

John Keats belongs to the second generation of Romantic poets. He was born on 31 October 1795 and died tragically young at the age of 26. In the history of English literature, Keats represents the image of a pure genius despite his brief career as a writer.<sup>92</sup> His father worked in the stables of Mr. Jennings in Moorfields, and Keats soon became Jennings' son-in-law when he married his daughter Frances. They had four children together – the eldest one was George, prematurely born John, Thomas, and a sister Fanny. Unfortunately, his father was killed in an accident in 1804, by falling of a horse at an early age of 36. Their mother brought them up with love and devotion and John in particular was very close to her. When she fell ill, he would occasionally act as if he was a guard with an old sword in his hands and as per the doctor's orders, he would not allow any visitors. As a young boy, he was sent to Mr. Clarke's School in Enfield. John's uncle, who was an officer at Duncan's ship, supported the family and had almost become an idol for him and his brothers.<sup>93</sup> However, John refused any authorities; he was always fighting and he would seek company similar to him. After his mother's passing in 1810, John became very unbalanced and moody. He had also become violent on occasions, bursting in tears or uncontrollable laughter. Despite his mental state, he would soon realize that his passion lied in writing poetry, and he kept himself busy by reading Chaucer, Defoe, Shakespeare, and his favourite *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. In 1817, he published a small volume of essays written in verses and at the same time, he passed an exemplary examination in the hospital.<sup>94</sup> Even though he turned into a surgeon of some repute at Edmonton, he "forgot all surgery" and started to write and read for about 8 hours a day. His affection for a young woman named Fanny Brewes had helped him to overcome the suffering resulting from the death of his brother Tom (died on tuberculosis at age of 22), with whom he was very close. Unfortunately, Fanny did not have the same feelings for him, which Keats believed was the reason he fell ill in his life. John Keats died of tuberculosis on 23 February in Rome in 1821, where he traveled to improve his health.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Stephen Coote, *John Keats: A Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995) 3.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Monckton Milnes, *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains, of John Keats* (London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street, 1848), 3-9.

<sup>94</sup> John Keats, *The Poetical Works of John Keats: With a Life* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1859), 8-15.

<sup>95</sup> William Michael Rossetti, *Life of John Keats* (Glasgow: Good Press, 2019), 75-8.

### 3.1 *Ode to a Nightingale*

In Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, the speaker almost wishes to be one of the birds and fly away with the flock. He envies the pure joy and happiness the animal feels, being aware that it is his human consciousness that separates him from nature. That could mean that he wishes to escape from the 'unavoidable death' the industrialism brings and return to nature where he can find harmony. In the end, the solace is in death itself and the nightingale becomes 'immortal' because "thou wast not born for death". The narrator cannot picture his own passing and realizes that without consciousness, one cannot experience beauty. He feels so detached from the reality that he does not know if it was a 'vision' or 'dream' and has to ask himself.<sup>96</sup>

1        My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
               My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
               One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
               But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
               That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees  
                       In some melodious plot  
               Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
 10                Singest of summer in full-throated ease.<sup>97</sup>

There is a lot of imagery in the poem (a visually descriptive or figurative language), which helps the reader to comprehend what the narrator perceives with his senses. For example, there are trees of "beechen green", which shows the speaker's ability to see at the moment. However, some readers argued that the setting of the poem is during the daytime, as the colours cannot be detected at night. Additionally, the "shadows numberless" indicates that there must be some source of light which creates the shades. Having said that, further in the poem, the speaker encounters many objects he cannot see and even the name of the bird itself would suggest that the bird sings during the night. While listening to the bird singing, the speaker's "heart aches" – one might think that it is from sadness or desolation, but it is

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<sup>96</sup> Cengage Learning Gale, *A study guide for John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale"* (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2015), 3.

<sup>97</sup> John Keats, *Odes* (West Chester: Spruce Alley Press, 2016), 17-20.

rather an ache of tremendous beauty he had a chance to see and hear. It is that very beauty the speaker finds that causes the pain and makes him wish that he, himself, would be that bird.<sup>98</sup>

Keats identifies himself with the nightingale while he is also negating himself at the same time. The number of opium makes him numb – he is having a hemlock poisoning, he has drunk alcohol and taken the dull opiate and he is feeling lethargic. The word ‘Lethe’ from Greek mythology refers to the river of forgetfulness. Greeks believed that drinking its water would make ghosts forget their lives on earth, so they could be reincarnated. Keats has not paralyzed his senses by taking opium, but he wishes to forget and numb the pain. Due to opium, he is losing his consciousness, which makes him questions whether what he can see is real or just a dream/vision. The nightingale is transforming into ‘light-winged Dryad’, which is more than a bird, it is an unreal creature from the world of Arcadia.<sup>99</sup>

11 O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
     Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
 Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
     Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
 O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
     Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
     With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
     And purple-stained mouth;  
 That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
 20           And with thee fade away into the forest dim:<sup>100</sup>

Throughout the second stanza, wine and its associations play the major role. The speaker takes a small sip of wine – “a draught of vintage” that also implies its quality as it of a “long age and cool’d”. The activities of “dance,” “song” and “mirth” are connected with drinking as they help to escape from the reality and pain of life.<sup>101</sup> Wine is also used in religious rituals and ceremonies in order to change the one’s state of mind and self-awareness. This

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<sup>98</sup> Gale, *A study guide for John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale"*, 4.

<sup>99</sup> Partha Kumar Mukhopadhyay, *Literary Spectrums: Recent Studies In English Literature* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 133-5.

<sup>100</sup> Keats, *Odes*, 17-20.

<sup>101</sup> Mukhopadhyay, *Literary Spectrums*, 136-7.



alcoholic beverage helps to overcome the state of consciousness and achieve the transcendental experiences in order to get some inspiration and imagination. He mentions the “Provençal song” played by ancient troubadours coming from the probable “warm South” of Greece. Additionally, the verse below called a “blushful Hippocrene”, which was a water spring on Mt. Helicon, drinking from it was supposed to bring forth an inspiration for poets. The speaker considers the water to be “full of the true” and he wishes to “leave the world unseen” and “fade away” accompanied by the nightingale “into the forest dim” from the harsh world (lines 19 and 20).<sup>102</sup>

21    Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
           What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
           Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
           Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
           Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
           And leaden-eyed despairs,  
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
 30            Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.<sup>103</sup>

The verses make the reader wonder why Keats would want to leave the world unseen and forget. Keats wanted to transport himself into the world of imagination, where he could achieve the ‘Great Mind’. He is seeking freedom from the harsh world full of worries and sufferings and wishes to enjoy the real bliss and beauty of the ultimate world. For Keats, the ultimate world is the one with the nightingale.<sup>104</sup>

31    Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
           Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
           Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:

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<sup>102</sup> Gale, *A study guide for John Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale”*, 4.

<sup>103</sup> Keats, *Odes*, 17-20.

<sup>104</sup> Mukhopadhyay, *Literary Spectrums*, 137-9.

Already with thee! tender is the night,  
     And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
         Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
             But here there is no light,  
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
 40             Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.<sup>105</sup>

Now, the speaker here no longer wishes to take any paralyzing substance to forget his sorrow anymore. He wants to fly away to the world of the nightingale “on the wings of Poesy”, and the means of transport to the ultimate world is not wine anymore, but the beauty of poetry. “But here there is no light” suggests the darkness of the forests as well as the gloom coming from industrialisation changing the environment.<sup>106</sup>

41     I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
         Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
         Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
         White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
             Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
                 And mid-May's eldest child,  
         The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
 50             The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

51     Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
         I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
         To take into the air my quiet breath;  
         Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
         To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
         While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad

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<sup>105</sup> Keats, *Odes*, 17-20.

<sup>106</sup> Mukhopadhyay, *Literary Spectrums*, 137-9.

In such an ecstasy!  
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
 60                   To thy high requiem become a sod.<sup>107</sup>

The tone of the poem changes a lot as the speaker's mood swings from positive to negative and vice versa. The speaker's earlier desire to die is replaced with the wish of a full-fledged life after realizing he would become a 'sod' in the silence of death. He appreciates that he can be 'too happy' as long as he stays mortal, because the song of the nightingale gives him the happiness and hope. That means that the transformation into an immortal state and breaking of the mortal bound is a pass into nothingness. There are two desires – the longing for a full life and an inclination to escape into 'easeful death' and yet the speaker does not know which option to choose.<sup>108</sup>

61       Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
           No hungry generations tread thee down;  
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
           In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
           Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
                   She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
                   The same that oft-times hath  
           Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
 70                   Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

71       Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
           To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
           As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.  
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
           Past the near meadows, over the still stream,

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<sup>107</sup> Keats, *Odes*, 17-20.

<sup>108</sup> Jalal Uddin Khan, *Perspectives: Romantic, Victorian, and Modern Literature* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 249-250.

Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
80 Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?<sup>109</sup>

Keats had chosen the night to be the setting of his poem. The darkness here is both literal and figurative as it represents the frustration people felt and the negative impact of industrialisation and modernization. The nature had changed across the country and the speaker “cannot see what flowers are at his feet” (line 41) as the government ordered to build the cities new railways and roads, despite devastating the environment. With the industrialisation came the age of consumption, which started the new economic activity. However, for some individuals it had very quickly become a way of life ‘a main reason for being in the world’. The consumption of goods however, cannot comfort the soul; the more we buy the more we want and yet, it leaves us unhappy. Consequently, one can escape the reality by consuming the opiates to experience a moment of happiness. In this context, Keats’ poem *Ode to a Nightingale* is an example of this phenomenon, where Keats himself is an individual, a consuming ‘object’ that experiences life through consumption.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Keats, *Odes*, 17-20.

<sup>110</sup> Prama Tagore, “Keats in an Age of Consumption: The “Ode to a Nightingale”,” *Keats-Shelley Journal* 49, (2000): 67-84, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30213047>.

## 4 PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Shelley was born three years after the outbreak of the French Revolution on August 4, 1792 in Sussex, England. He had aristocratic parents, which is ironic as most of his poems were full of criticism towards aristocracy. He was educated at Oxford, but expelled for writing a pamphlet questioning God's existence after few years. In 1812, he met a 19-year old Harriet Westbrook, an intelligent woman whom he married despite his cynicism towards marriage. Together with Harriet he was involved in political and social reforms in Ireland and Wales. Shelley also wrote many pamphlets with his comments and views on liberty, equality, and fraternity. Unfortunately, he fell in love quickly with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and abandoned his family because of her and his political interests. In 1816, his wife committed suicide by drowning, so he could marry Mary Shelley, who became a famous English author too. His close circle of friends included writers such as Lord Byron, John Keats, or Leigh Hunt. The Shelley's moved to Italy later in their lives where they spend much time at Byron's house near Lake Geneva; here Mary drew the inspiration for writing her best-known short, *Frankenstein*. Shelley died in a boating accident on July 8, 1822 in Italy. His body was cremated on the beach and the rumour has it that Mary preserved his heart as a symbol of their eternal love.<sup>111</sup>

### 4.1 *A Song to the Men of England*

The poem is a reference to Peterloo Massacre, which took place in Manchester, England in 1819, when a crowd of workers demanded the broadened right to vote in parliamentary elections. Despite the people's willingness to throw off the oppression, it resulted in bloodshed and people were attacked by the British army. Shelley wrote this protest poem as a calling for a political revolution. The poem shows the exploitation of working-class people across England and there is a growing conflict between the upper class and the working class. The poem is called a song, as Shelley believed that it would become so popular that people would use it as an anthem for their political movement. It is almost a wakeup call for all the men of England to unite and fight against their oppressors. The metaphor of bees is present throughout the whole poem, which is correlated to working class. The connections are obvious here; the men in factories are hardworking and busy, just like the bees working for the queen in the beehive. There is a large number of them, and both groups are working

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<sup>111</sup> Nataša M. Bakić-Mirić, Mirjana N. Lončar-Vujnović, "Percy Bysshe Shelley: The neglected genius," *Collection of Papers of the Faculty of Philosophy* 49, no. 3 (2019): 129-145, <https://doi.org/10.5937/ZRFFP49-21447>.

for someone superior – bees for the queen and the men for King at that time. The queen bee represents the heart of the hive and other bees would be aimless and lost without her. The weaker always need the leader or the one who tells them what to do. Furthermore, neither the bees nor the factory workers receive any benefits out of their hard work.<sup>112</sup>

- 1 Men of England, wherefore plough  
For the lords who lay ye low?  
Wherefore weave with toil and care  
The rich robes your tyrants wear?
  
- 2 Wherefore feed and clothe and save  
From the cradle to the grave  
Those ungrateful drones who would  
Drain your sweat—nay, drink your blood?<sup>113</sup>

Shelley brings to reader's attention the negative impact the industrialisation has had on the ordinary men. The second stanza serves as a warning to the people who blindly follow those on the top. Shelley states that if the working class continues to allow the aristocracy to exploit them, they will soon be digging their own graves. He attempts to dare the working class to act and start thinking about their own interests. Further, in the second stanza, the factory owners are compared to drones, the male bees who do nothing productive and just feed on the honey made by the worker bees. That might suggest that the "ungrateful" business proprietors and the aristocracy take and demand everything the workers make.<sup>114</sup>

In the last verse of second stanza Shelley writes "drain your sweat – nay, drink your blood?" which clearly shows the dependency of the business owners on those who work for them. Moreover, one might think that the owners are compared to vampires who feed on the weak and suck their blood. They can only survive by doing so just like the rich can only survive by exploiting the poor. In this context, Shelley shows how powerless the business owners would be if it were not the working class.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Gale, Cengage Learning, *A Study Guide for Percy Bysshe Shelley's "A Song "Men of England""* (Michigan: Gale, Cengage Learning, 2017), 3.

<sup>113</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited by W. M. Rossetti (London: E. Moxon, Son, and Co., 1878), 41-42.

<sup>114</sup> Gale, *A Study Guide for Percy Bysshe Shelley's "A Song "Men of England""*, 3.

<sup>115</sup> "Song to the Men of England," Poetry Prof, last modified February 20, 2020, <https://poetryprof.com/song-to-the-men-of-england/>.

- 3 Wherefore, Bees of England, forge  
Many a weapon, chain, and scourge,  
That these stingless drones may spoil  
The forced produce of your toil?
- 4 Have ye leisure, comfort, calm,  
Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?  
Or what is it ye buy so dear  
With your pain and with your fear?
- 5 The seed ye sow, another reaps;  
The wealth ye find, another keeps;  
The robes ye weave, another wears;  
The arms ye forge, another bears.
- 6 Sow seed—but let no tyrant reap:  
Find wealth—let no imposter heap:  
Weave robes—let not the idle wear:  
Forge arms—in your defence to bear.
- 7 Shrink to your cellars, holes, and cells—  
In hall ye deck another dwells.  
Why shake the chains ye wrought? Ye see  
The steel ye tempered glance on ye.
- 8 With plough and spade and hoe and loom  
Trace your grave and build your tomb  
And weave your winding-sheet—till fair  
England be your Sepulchre.<sup>116</sup>

The poem mentions three industries: farming, textiles, and manufacturing. The speaker names the tools that the men of England would use before the Revolution came. They were

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<sup>116</sup> Shelley, *The complete poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 41-42.

working “with plough and spade and hoe and loom”, which were later replaced with the “forge,” “weapon” and “chain”. Having said that, many people continued to farm even after the Industrial revolution, but the majority started to work in the factories. Throughout the poem, Shelley criticizes various industries and again, the picture of forge, blacksmiths and armament factories is dominant (viz. Blake’s poem *Tyger*). He wonders why people would want to work in the factories, helping to make the tools that ultimately destroy them. The last stanza points out that the working class had to stand up to the rich, otherwise England would be its tomb. Shelley believed that living in ignorance is as if one was already dead. The invisible shackles the men made themselves, keep them prisoners of their own lives and such exploitation can be comparable to slavery. Shelley implies a question what the point of life is then. People themselves should decide what rights and duties are theirs.<sup>117</sup>

Although the poem was not published during his life (similarly to his other political poems such as *The Mask of Anarchy*, or *Sonnet: England 1819*), it slowly became part of the literature of progressive movements and keeps inspiring broader audiences until today. Writers like Shelley, Blake, and Wordsworth had one thing in common; they have showed us the damage and harm that industrialisation had caused. Writing of such politically charged content, intended for public, was immensely dangerous and punishable by law.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Poetry Prof, “Song to the Men of England.”

<sup>118</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Popular Songs: The Political Poems of 1819-1820* (Seattle: Entre Rios Books, 2016), 10.



## CONCLUSION

We cannot deny that the Industrial Revolution had a great influence on Romantic poetry. Various writers and artists felt deeply about the negative impact of industrialism, and they would use their work to imply and deliver their warnings. During the Industrial Era, new factories and job opportunities would attract the people from rural areas, so the urbanisation increased. As a result, the capitalist society demanded higher production of goods and market expansion, which resulted in the destruction of nature, poor living conditions and child labour. Such changes led many poets and writers to a critique of the Industrial Revolution. Poets such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Keats, or Percy Bysshe Shelley tried to make people remember the times before the industrial changes by turning to nature and simplicity. Many of them would also use their work to express their political views on social changes and its negative consequences. The increasing demand of goods had resulted in child labour and child exploitation. For example, William Blake wrote two poems focusing on children working as chimneysweepers. In these poems, he would compare those children to the innocent lambs enjoying the beauty of nature while contrasting it with the hardship of their work when their innocence is ‘lost’ and their experience is a result of their isolation and, quite often, their death. The capital of Britain had become a filthy and polluted place and Blake would very often criticize it. London was full of prostitution, which led to the spread of various diseases, child abuse and corruption. Another Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, blamed aristocracy for exploitation of the working class in his poem *A Song to the Men of England*. While Blake and Shelley would express their views more explicitly and directly in their poems, other poets, such as Wordsworth and Keats focused on ‘the true beauty and simplicity of nature’ with their criticism being rather more implicit. They believed that by turning to nature and its beauty, a human soul could experience the greatest joy. By frequently contrasting the polluted and cramped cities to pure nature, they achieved to show their readers how damaging the industrialisation was. In Keats’ *Ode to a Nightingale*, the speaker envies the bird’s pure happiness and wants to escape and fly away, too. In the poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, Wordsworth mentions the dancing daffodils in the fields and again, he appreciates the feelings that he gets from the beauty he sees as he wanders/wonders. This shows that only “nature can be the escape from the unavoidable

death” industrialism brings. Even in Blake’s *Innocence*, children feel the happiness as they lie on a beautiful green meadow in the midst of nature.<sup>119</sup>

In this respect, one way of understanding the Romantic poetry is to look at it as a celebration and glorification of nature. However, if one is to look beneath the surface, it is clear that all poets would refuse the new and modern world introduced by the industrialisation. Despite the fact that many of these poems might seem timeless, one needs to look at them within the context of a particular era. Thus, it cannot be denied that the Industrial Revolution has had a great influence over the Romantic Poetry. The Industrial Revolution has introduced a new world that keeps on expanding. We have become the society of consumers and yet it does feel as if we never have enough. People are unsatisfied and unhappy, so the search for meaning and simplicity seems more topical than ever. It almost appears that not much has changed since the times of Blake, Wordsworth, or Keats and perhaps we need their poems now as much as people did in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The beauty of art is that it travels through time, it asks questions but the search for answers is what provokes the mind of a reader. The Romantic poetry did indeed provoke the minds of its readers; the criticism of Industrial Revolution is not ignored but implicitly hidden within the verses.

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<sup>119</sup> “The Industrial Revolution as an Antithesis to Romantic Poetry,” Britlitsurvey, last modified October 27, 2014, <https://britlitsurvey2.wordpress.com/2014/10/27/the-industrial-revolution-as-an-antithesis-to-romantic-poetry/>.

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