The Complexity of Human Nature in William Blake's "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience"

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Završni rad

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Bachelor's Thesis

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Abstract

The paper gives a general introduction to the Romantic period and biographical information on William Blake's life. After that, it analyzes his poetry with regard to the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. The poems analyzed are counterparts, "Holy Thursday" of *Innocence* and "Holy Thursday" of *Experience*, "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Innocence* and of *Experience* and "The Lamb" and "The Tyger". The primary focus of the paper is on showing how complex human beings are, and that innocence and experience are not simply two polarized states of human soul. Moreover, by bringing them into the context of the age, it is going to show the inevitable symbiosis between good and evil, between innocence and experience. As the era brought about social changes most clearly seen in the rise of the bourgeoisie, it also negatively affected the lower parts of the social ladder. Blake was mostly concerned with these issues, so his poems present the negative effects of the radical social change on the common people. While it is typical to assume that the state of innocence is mostly concerned with children as they are naturally inexperienced and naïve, the paper shows how the surroundings may corrupt, spoil, and scar the fundamental innocence of human beings.

Key words: Romantic period, poetry, William Blake, *Songs of Innocence*, *Songs of Experience*

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Introduction

The first chapter of the paper is going to give the basic information on the Romantic period. It will present the origin of the name, set it in time, and describe social and literary changes of the period. Then, William Blake, a poet, painter, and engraver, will be introduced and the most important information about his life and literary works will be highlighted. Among many of his creations, the most popular ones are certainly two collections of poems, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, which are going to be the focal points of the paper. First, the common features of the two poem collections are going to be explained, after which the paper will focus on the major characteristics of each of the collection. Furthermore, it is going to compare some of the most prominent poems, the "Holy Thursday" of *Innocence* and of *Experience*, "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Innocence* and of *Experience*, and lastly "The Lamb" and "The Tyger". Each of the counterparts conveys a certain message about the "two contrary states of human soul", by showing that there is much more to those states and that they cannot simply be polarized in that way. The aim of the paper is to show, in the two "Holy Thursday" poems, the duality of the charity school systems, by emphasizing the criticism of the society which manipulates and controls the innocent ones, caring only about their personal interests. Moreover, in the two "The Chimney Sweeper" poems, the range of social criticism is going to be widened and it will show how innocence and experience can intertwine and encourage critical thinking. Lastly, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" are going to frame the discussion by claiming that innocence is the state in which people are compliant, and that experience is marked by knowledge and understanding of the world.

1. The Romantic Period

As Ferber states in *A Companion to European Romanticism*, in the late eighteenth century Jena, the word "romantic" stood for literature that is distinguished from the classic literature. However, Schlegel's circle did not coin the word, but it had already existed for a long period of time. Etymology suggests that "romantic" derives from the Latin name for the city of Rome, Roma, and that in the Middle Ages it developed numerous different meanings. "Romauns" referred to typical kind of literature written in Gallo-Roman Old French, and so today the tales of chivalry, magic or love are known as "romances". However, Schlegel and his circle used the term "romantisch" in the meaning of "modern" and "Christian", but neither they nor the "Lake School" in England called themselves Romantics at the time (Ferber 3) – that name was assigned to them half a century later by the English historians.

The Romantic period is denoted as the time between the year 1798, when Wordsworth and Coleridge published their *Lyrical Ballads,* and 1832, when Sir Walter Scott died. However, Ferber points out that in "In England we often open the period at 1789, the date of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* that also nicely coincides with the beginning of the French Revolution" (Ferber 8). Be that as it may, as stated in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, it was "a turbulent period, during which England experienced the ordeal of change from a primarily agricultural society, where wealth and power had been concentrated in the landholding aristocracy, to a modern industrial nation" (Abrams 1). Consequently, a new social class of working people was created who either had to move to the cities or remain living poorly as farm laborers. So, in addition to the government's decision not to interfere with the new economic changes, the polarization of the society was inevitable – "the two classes of capital and labor, the large owner or trader and the possessionless wageworker, the rich and the poor" (Abrams 3). The writers of the period believed that they do not share a specific doctrine, but rather that with the "release of energy, experimental boldness, and creative power" (Abrams 5) they attribute to the literary renaissance. That attitude towards innovation in literature went hand in hand with the political and social revolutions of the time: "The Revolution generated a pervasive feeling that this was a great age of new beginnings when (…) everything was possible, and not only in the political and social realm but in intellectual and literary enterprises as well" (Abrams 5).

2. Blake's biography

William Blake is an English poet, painter and engraver born in London on November 28, 1757. He was born into a family of "moderate means" ("William Blake"); his father, James, was a hosiery merchant and his mother Catherine was left a similar business by her first husband. Blake was raised in his parents' home, above their business at 28 Broad Street in London. His parents supported his artistic talents, so after being taught basic reading and writing skills, they sent him to study drawing with Henry Pars "whose establishment was one of London's best art schools" (Bloom 12). While studying there, he acquired many skills connected with art history, but unfortunately the schooling expenses were too high so in 1771 he was apprenticed to a "master engraver" ("William Blake"). The engraver, James Basire, assigned Blake to sketch Westminster Abbey, what "may mark the first stirrings of Blake's later Gothic tendencies" (Bloom 12). After that, he enrolled into the Royal Academy of Arts and earned a living by engraving "illustrations for publications ranging from novels such as *Don Quixote* to serials such as *Ladies' Magazine*" ("William Blake"). At the age of 25 he married Catherine Boucher whom he taught how to write and read, and even though they were married for almost half a century, they did not have any children.

John Flaxman, Blake's friend, introduced him to Harriet Mathew, who, along with her husband, became Blake's "artistic ally; he was the center of attention at entertainments in their home" (Bloom 13). Also, because of Flaxman's and Mathew's support, Blake's *Poetical Sketches* were published in 1783. Later on, in 1784, he wrote *An Island in the Moon*, followed by *Songs of Innocence* (1789), *The Book of Thel* (1789), *Tiriel* (1789), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790s), and *Songs of Experience* (1794).

Blake claimed to have had visions, in particular that he saw the spirit of his deceased brother Robert. However, his parents did not believe him, so he found comfort in the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg. His preaching of a "gentle, mystical interpretation of Christianity" (Bloom 14) had affected Blake a lot, so he wrote works with religious themes, such as *There Is No Natural Religion* (1788) and *All Religions Are One* (1788). Also, in 1789 the French Revolution began – "that uprising and the American Revolution of a decade before influenced Blake's work and thought extensively" (Bloom 14).

3. *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*

As it was previously mentioned, *Songs of Innocence* were published in 1789, and *Songs of Experience* in 1794. Despite the five-year gap between them, the connection between the two units in inevitable. They contain common states and symbols which is why it can be said:

> The relationship of each unit to the series as a whole might be stated as a kind of progression: from the states of innocence and experience to the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience,* to each individual song within the series, to the symbols within each song, to the words that give the symbols their existence. (Gleckner 70)

Therefore, it is obvious that the reader must be aware of the context in which the poems were written because "each song out of its context means a great deal less than Blake expected of his total invention" (Glecker 70). That is why, by reading the poems in anthologies, readers often lose the initial context in which they were written. Blake wanted "that we experience *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience* in, as it were, a three-dimensional way and know them – in the ways they energize and activate one another" (Simpson 22). So, when it comes to Blake, it is important to be familiar with his engravings and illustrations as well as with his poems. Both in poetry and in art, he based his theories "on a whole-hearted and unqualified belief in the power of imagination and the reality of inspiration" (Blunt 22), as well as on the "Divine vision" because he "believed himself to be in immediate contact with "spirits" who revealed to him his visions and inspired his poems" (Blunt 22).

3.1. Songs of Innocence

Blake's *Songs of Innocence* should not be interpreted from the point of view that the author himself is innocent, but rather it must be understood that "Innocence is no idyllic state. Innocence is born and has to exist in the world of Experience which is constantly at pains to corrupt and exploit it" (Simpson 23). Moreover, *Songs of Innocence* can be interpreted as a "form of social criticism" that, by contrasting, "satirize[s] the state of experience" and "expose[s] its hypocrisies" (Erdman 117). They are introduced and sung by the piper whose

"point of view is prevailingly happy; he is conscious of the child's essential divinity and assured of his present protection" (Gleckner 71). However, the elements of *Songs of Experience* are also present so "the note of sorrow is never completely absent from the piper's voice" (Gleckner 71). Because of that, the state of innocence must be guided "not by regulations, but by wisdom and prophecy and by protector figures" (Simpson 23), such as angels, fairies, shepherds, mothers and the chimney sweeper, all of who are labeled by Christ-like values of "selfness love and the spontaneous exercise of mercy, pity, peace" (Simpson 23). Also, *Songs of Innocence* are mostly dynamic in terms of communication because "people speak and listen" through different voices; "the shepherd hears the lambs' innocent calls (…), parents are heard communicating their wisdoms (…), and children (…) can hardly wait to share it with others" (Simpson 24). The illustrations also respond to that, they are "the direct reflection of the tone of the poems and Blake's state of mind" (Blunt 49), so the figures are mostly portrayed "upright or seated, with children seen dancing or at rest in the laps of their mothers" (Simpson 24).

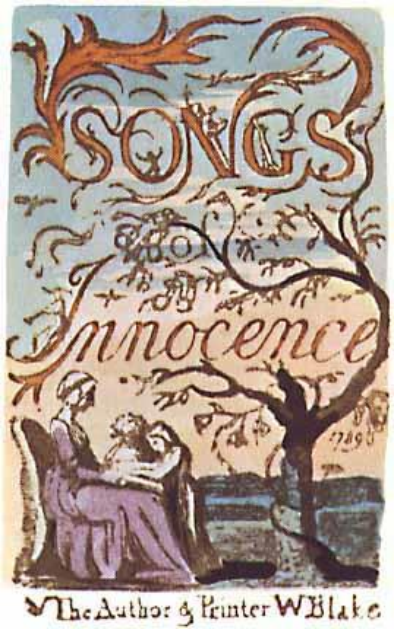

Photo 1. Title page to *Songs of Innocence*[1]

[1] The photo was downloaded from the website: www.gailgastfield.com/innocence/soi.html. Accessed 10 June 2017.

3.2. Songs of Experience

This collection of poems, in our age, is often considered to be greater than *Songs of Innocence* because the first collection is seen as "slighter (naïve)", while *Songs of Experience* are believed to have been written after the author has already had some negative life experience and thus produced "a more disillusioned (less deceived) and deeper poetry" (Simpson 22). These are introduced by the Bard whose "voice is solemn and more deeply resonant, for the high-pitched joy of innocence is now only a memory" (Gleckner 71). The world represented here is selfish, hypocritical and jealous, so the illustrations correspond to that as well: "The figures inhabiting the illustrations to *Songs of Experience* cling to the earth in attitudes of sorrow – huddling, kneeling, stooping" (Simpson 24).

Photo 2. Title page to *Songs of Experience*[2]

[2] The photo was downloaded from the website: https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/blake/william/experience/. Accessed 10 June 2017.

Noticeably, the title page represents the mood which will be prevailing in the poems following. The figures are completely opposite of those illustrated on the front page of *Songs of Innocence*, so seated figures with their children running around them happily are replaced by the "two dead bodies, an aged man and a woman, laid out on a bier (…), while two younger mourning figures move around them" (Blunt 53). As well as that, the contrast is also pointed out with the choice of the script for the words of the title because "unadorned Roman capitals [are] opposed to the fantastic vegetable-curls of the earlier letters" (Blunt 54).

Despite the obvious differences, this collection of poems cannot function without the previous one because together they represent the two "contrary states of the human soul". Therefore, the majority of the poems found in one collection have their corresponding poems in the second collection, but they are written in a different mood or state. Those "inter-relationships" can be seen in the examples of "Introduction" that goes together with "Earth's Answer", "Holy Thursday" of *Songs of Innocence* with "Holy Thursday" of *Songs of Experience*, "The Tyger" which offsets "The Lamb", "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Innocence* and of *Experience* etc. (Patridge 222).

To sum up, it can be said that "the states are separate, the two contrary states of the human soul, and the songs were written not merely for our enjoyment, or even for our edification, but for our salvation" (Gleckner 71). They denote the complexity of human characteristics, and show that one cannot function without the other. In that sense, Blake presents innocence as a state in which people are unable to completely comprehend and oppose their surroundings, while experience provides them with the ability to control or oppose the current social affairs.

4. **"Holy Thursday" of *Songs of Innocence* and "Holy Thursday" of *Songs of Experience***

It is hard for an experienced reader to approach "Holy Thursday" in *Songs of Innocence* with a truly innocent mind. Ideally, it would be read without any knowledge on the charity schools of the time and since the poem is indeed set in the *Songs of Innocence*, perhaps it should be interpreted in that way. In that sense, it represents a "thoughtful and kind" (Gleckner 72) poem, with charity and guardians who take care of the children in their parish. They provide them with education and clothes "the children walking two & two, in red & blue & green" (Blake 2)[3], teach them the proper behavior and lead them into St. Paul's Cathedral. The setting of the poem is, as the title indicates, on Holy Thursday. The sacred setting signifies that the characters mentioned must be like that as well, so the reader is presented with "grey-headed beadles" who, with their "wands as white as snow", the color of which would suggest their innocence, lead poor children closer to God. The children themselves are innocent lambs whose song raises them straight to heaven: "(…) multitude of lambs, / Thousands of little boys & girls raisin their innocent hands. / Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song" (Blake 7-9).

However, the line before the final suggests a slight irony in the tone by saying "Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor" (Blake 12), which opens the discussion about the "system within which Blake's innocent children and wise guardians were working" (Fairer 538). In the reality of Blake's time, "the charity school movement was perceived to be an experiment in social engineering – an experiment that worked to some extent against the natural grain" (Fairer 539). Therefore, the innocence of the children can be questionable as well, because it was obviously "exploited" by those who were "guarding" them. Once that knowledge is acquired, the poem can be interpreted in a different sense, from the point of

[3] All the poems will be cited according to: Keynes, Geoffrey, editor. *Blake – Complete Writings.* Oxford University Press, 1972.

view of a modern and experienced reader who may then wonder why Blake placed it into *Songs of Innocence* in the first place. As it was said, the author believed that human state of innocence must be without any regulations and only led by protector figures. However, the true state of innocence is the one humanity has restricted a long time ago; ideally, it should be with "no discipline, no regimentation, no marching, no uniforms, and no guardians – merely free, uninhibited, irresponsible, thoughtless play" (Gleckner 72). On the contrary, this poem presents the children who were walking according to the rules, who were dressed according to the rules, and who even sung according to the rules. So, they were "caught up in a system (…), they were controlled, exhibited, and interpreted, and (…) their singing, learning, dress, and behavior were regulated – (…) in short, they were contextualized by an anxious society and in the process had their innocence compromised" (Fairer 539).

Photo 3. Illustration to "Holy Thursday" of *Songs of Innocence*[4]

[4] The photo was downloaded from the website: http://4umi.com/blake/innocence/13. Accessed 10 June 2017.

Not only did Blake deal with the topic in the poem, but he also illustrated it and showed "the frieze-like train of children (…) [with] a naïve rigidity", the children who innocently thought they will not be shaped accordingly to the needs of the society (Blunt 47). Those were the poor children who were seen only as the future "servants, apprentices, or ship-boys" (Fairer 543), so it was important for the politics of the time to provide them with such an education. Moreover, by the appearances on the sermon, they were primarily used as the means of raising money because they were the living proof that the charities were functional. By the children's uniformed clothes and behavior, it was seen that the charities are indeed training them to be exactly what the country was going to need in the future and that they are not trying to "allow education to become a dynamic concept that might challenge the *status quo*" (Fairer 544).

It shows how human nature is complex; even children, who are supposed to be God's innocent lambs, are caught up in the society which constantly spoils their essential innocence, so they approach the stage of experience way faster than they should. However, the reason why it is still a part of *Songs of Innocence* is because those children raise above their supposed guardians; in their singing, they act freely, singing "like a mighty wind" or "like harmonious thunderings" and manage to overcome the chains of the society and thus "raise to heaven the voice of song" (Blake 9-10).

While the previous poem is concerned "with the immediate effect of the children's singing", their lifting above the beadles, "Holy Thursday" of *Songs of Experience* "raises the issue of what actual words they might have been using" (Fairer 550). Therefore, that poem is an echo of the previous one and it puts it in a wider context because it questions what happens when the children are done with the holy singing. It reveals the reality that was only slightly ironically presented in the innocent "Holy Thursday", the reality which is cold, hopeless and poor. Besides the poem, Blake also draws the context of the entire poem with an illustration which is, unlike the previous one, marked by cooler tones that paint the "wintery landscape" (Fairer 550).

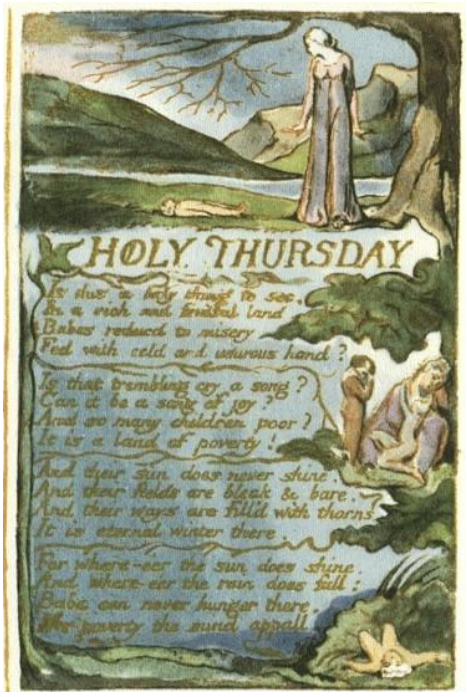

Photo 4. Illustration to "Holy Thursday" of *Songs of Experience*[5]

However, the wintery landscape is far from what one would imagine it to be; there is no glory, attractiveness, or beauty in it, but rather "an infant corpse [that] lies on a valley floor" and the stream that "flows parallel to, but out of reach of the child" (Fairer 550). Obviously, the poem and the illustration convey the same message which reveals the hypocrisies of the society and questions the "good" that the charities claim to be doing. With "Holy Thursday" of *Experience* Blake proves what he only alluded to in its counterpart of *Innocence*; the poor children are essentially the lowest parts of the society and they cannot progress on the social ladder, since "the stream" is out of their reach. As a *Song of Experience,* it knows that there is nothing holy in the acts of the guardians from the previous poem, but rather that "babes [are] reduc'd to misery, / Fed with cold and usurious hand" (Blake 3-4). The reality which was so carefully presented by the charities is now shattered because it shows what is left after the glorious sermons. Although the children may be nicely dressed and arranged in an order,

[5] The photo was downloaded from the website: http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/sie/sie27.htm. Accessed 10 June 2017.

behind their joyful songs there is a sorrow cry since they remain hungry and poor: “Is that trembling cry a song? / Can it be a song of joy? / And so many children poor? / It is a land of poverty!” (Blake 5-8).

So, it can be said that these poems show the duality of the charity school system as “an odd combination of the claims of innocence and experience” (Fairer 556). By revealing the innocent nature of children on one side, and the experienced nature of the beadles, Blake shows how the experienced ones manipulate and shape the reality for the innocent ones, according to their own vested interests. By doing so, he emphasizes critique of the society which literally forces the children to change their nature and become what is needed of them.

5. "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Songs of Innocence* and "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Songs of Experience*

As well as in "Holy Thursday", Blake also suggests the loss of innocence in favor of experience in the two "The Chimney Sweeper" poems. When the topic of industrialization is discussed, everybody mostly focuses on the great and positive impact it had. However, child labor is one of the negative outcomes of the time which is often neglected. Unlike many, William Blake has touched upon the problem with "The Chimney Sweeper" poems from the two collections. By contrasting innocence and experience, Blake forms poems that carry a heavy criticism of the society and politics of the time and reveal "a plead for social justice" (Afrin 27). Not only that, but he also widens the circle of the ones who are to blame for such social order, and stresses the impact of experience when it comes to the fight for the betterment.

"The Chimney Sweeper" from *Songs of Innocence* is "a narrative poem spoken by an unnamed sweeper" (McClard 13) who, in the first stanza, presents some facts about his life. Immediately it is seen that his mother died and that he was sold by his father so that now he belongs to the class of laboring children of England. However, he does not continue to talk about himself, but rather puts the focus on a fellow chimney sweeper, a young and innocent Tom Dacre. By referring to the chimney sweeper by his name, Blake manages to make the poem seem more personal, as the readers feel that they have really met the boy. He stands as an example for all the orphaned, working children of the time who lived and worked in poor conditions and who, just as Tom Dacre, had their "innocence forcibly stolen from [them]" (Afrin 27). Although they were forced to grow up more quickly, those children were also God's lambs, the symbols of "youth, innocence and purity" (McClard 14). As comforting as it may sound, the children were treated nothing like God's sacred animals; they had their hair cut so the soot could not spoil it, which symbolizes "a cruel induction ceremony" (McClard 14) that was supposed to prepare and push innocent children into the experienced world of grown-ups: "(…) cried when his head/ That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd" (Blake 5-6). The reality was so harsh that it also transferred in Tom's dreams so he sees "thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack, / (…) all of them lock'd up in coffins of black" (Blake 11-12), the black coffins of the "soot that stuck on their body when they came out after sweeping

the chimney" (Afrin 28). Those coffins may also suggest the danger of death which the children were exposed to, but in which Tom sees salvation rather than ending. It is rather tragic that Tom views "death as a release from the life of suffering that looms ahead of him" (McClard 15), and dreams that it will bring him to an idyllic, pastoral state: "Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run, / And was in a river, and shine in the Sun" (Blake 15-16). Also, it is suggested that the chimney sweepers have an unmeasurable faith in God because it is Angels whom they see as their guardians and as the ones that will lead them to a better life. Although it is all happening only in his dream, Tom's "faith in God is so strong that it becomes his only constant source of hope and inspiration" (Afrin 28). It is the source of his optimism and innocence that gives him strength to believe in a better (after)life: "Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm" (Blake 23). Therefore, the subject of the poem is indeed in the state of innocence since he does not judge anyone for his situation, he does not know the words in which to describe his social order, but rather humbly accepts his "duty", hoping it will bring him salvation eventually: "So if all do their duty they need not fear harm" (Blake 24). Although the speaker and Tom Dacre are unable to acknowledge it, this *Song of Innocence* should not be seen only as a complexity of feelings that the laboring children go through, but also as a social criticism of an oppressing and ruthless society.

Despite the negativity, the poem is still set in the *Songs of Innocence* because it provides the reader with the same idea that Tom thinks of – innocence that leads to salvation. Because of that, the tone of the illustration is also prevailingly happy, so the "dancing forms of children seem natural extensions of the vines and leaves and curling calligraphy" (Freedman). Also, the greenery and the sunlight suggests an idyllic, pastoral state that one aspires to achieve, so both the poem and its accompanying illustration show "the platitudinous image of salvation, not a depiction of the real conditions of suffering" (Freedman).

Photo 5. The illustration to "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Songs of Innocence*[6]

On the contrary, "The Chimney Sweeper" from *Songs of Experience* is written in a completely different tone. The speaker is not identified as a child, or as it should be, *a lamb,* but as "a little black thing among the snow" (Blake 1). So, that initial dehumanization reveals the attitude that will be seen throughout the entire poem – the attitude of a child who is, despite his age, experienced and know exactly what kind of world he was put it. The ironical lines in the first stanza indicate how the child feels about his parents: "Where are thy father & mother say? / They are both gone up to church to pray" (Blake 3-4). Although it is not immediately explicitly stated, unlike Tom in the first poem, this child is able to feel resentment and pain. He has been through enough of the real world to be aware that the salvation is a myth, and that his parents are sending him straight to death: "They clothed me in the clothes of death, / And taught me to sing the notes of woe" (Blake 7-8). However, "Blake's target is not parents who force their children to work, but rather the rich and the

[6] The photo was downloaded from the website: oldgreypony.wordpress.com/tag/songs-of-innocence-and-experience/. Accessed 10 June 2017.

powerful who exploit the poor and the weak" (Afrin 29). So, the child shifts the resentment he feels towards the higher institutions, the ones that initially forced his parents into such acts: "(…) praise God & his Priest & King/ Who make up a heaven of our misery" (Blake 11-12). With these lines Blake criticizes the bigger picture, not just the charity school system as he did in "Holy Thursday", and puts the blame on both "the ecclesiastical and government establishments" (McClard 16). Consequently, the boy completely loses the faith in God, who should be a leading spiritual hero, and thus sees no hope of betterment of his life. Despite all the negativity that permeates the poem, the child still manages to keep a part of his innocence: "And because I am happy & dance & sing, / They think they have done me no injury" (Blake 9-10). So, although the child has been so emotionally and physically tortured that he is not able to imagine a world without misery, there is still an innocent side of him which shows that even experience cannot function completely without some childish naivety.

The illustration that accompanies the poem is completely different from the one of *Songs of Experience.* The bright colors and the pastoral state are gone and replaced by black, white, and muddy brown colors which suggest "a winter scene where nothing can grow or thrive" (Freedman). Moreover, there are no dancing children but rather a lonesome, exhausted boy "hardly able to withstand the onslaught of winter and hard work" (Freedman). So, this poem is the one that gives the real image of the child laborers of the time – tired, hungry, unhappy, disappointed children far away from the dreams of salvation and God himself.

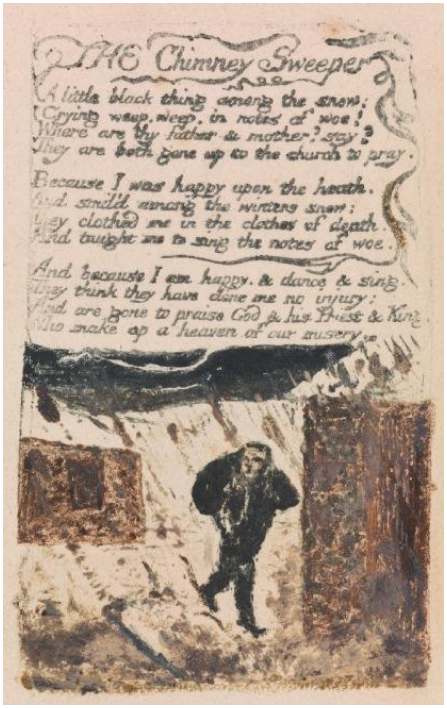

Photo 6. The illustration to "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Songs of Experience*[7]

Although it may look like the poems are solely about the desperate fates of chimney sweepers, they are also "a comment on the contrary states of innocence and experience" (Freedman). While innocence is a frightening naïve condition that accepts the unjust social order of the time, experience explicitly calls for a change. In that sense, Blake highlights the importance of human experience as a trigger for social progress. He emphasizes that experience does not necessarily mean something negative, but that, by using it rightly, it can become the means for fighting unjustly organized religion and society.

[7] The photo was downloaded from the website: www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/william-blake/songs-innocence-and-experience/songs-experience-chimney-sweeper. Accessed 10 June 2017.

6. "The Lamb" and "The Tyger"

All of the previous poems deal with the presentations of innocence and experience, while "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" capture the pure essence of it. Therefore, it can be said that the duality and complexity of human nature is best seen in those two poems. While on the one hand, "The Lamb" is "the simplest but one of the most beautiful lyrics of *Innocence*" (Jose 88), its counterpart in *Songs of Experience*, "The Tyger", represents everything but the beauty and is concerned with the "most dreadful forces" (Jose 90) that humans can have.

As previously mentioned, Blake's poems cannot be observed without his illustrations because only together can they convey the true message which the author was trying to send. Therefore, the illustration for "The Lamb" indicates the pastoral setting of the poem, with "two trees spreading branches intertwine[d] around and between the stanzas" that frame the poem and bring the child and the lamb into one unit (Jose 88).

Photo 7. Illustration to "The Lamb"[8]

[8] The photo was downloaded from the website https://katielynnolson.wordpress.com/2014/09/10/william-blake/. Accessed 10 June 2017.

The pastoral setting is also transferred in the poem "by the stream & o'er the mead" (Blake 5), as it is the only appropriate place in which the two examples of divine innocence may live. Since the child is portrayed in its most natural state, naked, it is normal to assume that he is marked by the quality of innocence. Moreover, placing him next to the lamb, the God's scared animal, the assumption of their connection to God is inevitable. While in the first stanza the softness, gentleness, and tenderness only hint the connection, the second stanza explicitly answers the question who provided the lamb with all of those qualities: "He is called by thy name, / For he calls himself a Lamb" (Blake 13-14). So, God, Jesus, calls himself a Lamb and therefore, because the animal is the reflection of Him, refers to it with the exact same name. Moreover, the unity of the child and the lamb with the Lord is taken to another level once it is confirmed that the child is, at the same time, the God himself: "He is meek, & he is mild; /He became a little child. / I a child, & thou a lamb, /We are called by his name" (Blake 15-17). By drawing such parallels and confirming that children and lambs are God's own reflections, Blake shows his own beliefs that innocence, reincarnated in children as God's lambs, must be praised and protected. In that sense, this poem can be seen as an initial, ideal state that one should aspire to achieve. However, one must not forget that "just as the lamb and the tiger have one common creator, so also, William Blake is the maker of 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger'" (Jose 95). While the children may be innocent and divine, they also live in the world which is not – and Blake knows that. So, the author presents the readers with the counterparts; first, he will show them the divine state of innocence and then how it is influenced and changed as a result of experience or, more precisely, an experienced society.

"The Tyger" is both physically and psychologically completely opposed to "The Lamb", with its "fearful symmetry", burning eyes and the inability to be tamed. However, it must not be assumed that the lamb is good and that the tiger is pure evil. "The Tyger" represents experience, not evil, "it is bright, energetic, and vital" (Bloom 20). It can be said that it stands for the experience in general; everything that was hinted in "Holy Thursday" or "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Experience* is contained in this poem. The reality is harsh, and the experienced know it, so they either become a part of it, or fight against it. In that sense, the question might rise "Did Blake believe that transformation from the gentle lamb into the powerful tiger is an integral part of maturation?" (Bloom 18). "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Experience* would certainly confirm this because the "changes in the economy, society, and

politics changed the way people lived" so Blake's tiger is "strong, intimidating – a solitary, peripheral creature" (Bloom 18). Therefore, the tiger does not signify evil, but rather the ability to understand the changing society. So, in "Holy Thursday", the tigers blend in the society by controlling it according to their own will, while experienced chimney sweepers want to purify the society: "Things which burn, even tigers perhaps, are either purifying something or being purified" (Adams 21). Therefore, innocence and experience do not simply mean the polarized states, but convey a much powerful message, referring to those in the society who are manipulated, unable to see the opportunity for a change, and those who take action to shape their own faith. In that sense, Bloom summarizes the entire relationship between the two states:

> While the Lamb merely follows the flock, the tiger has learned from experience and is autonomous. No longer following the crowd or a single shepherd, the tiger is a hunter directly in search of satisfaction. Knowledge has given the animal its power: the intensity of it is seen in the beast's bright eyes. (Bloom 19)

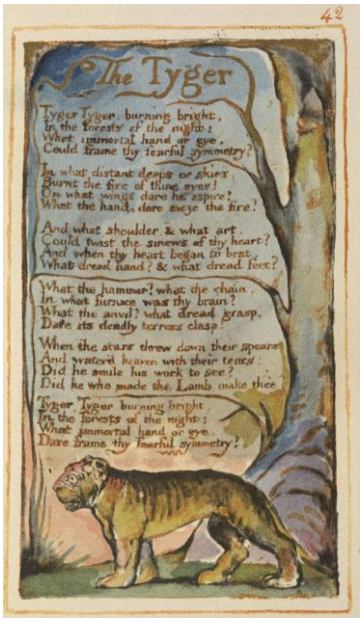

Photo 8. The illustration to "The Tyger"[9]

[9] The photo was downloaded from the website: www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2014/nov/18/william-blake-the-tyger-art-poem-tigers. Accessed 10 June 2017.

Unlike its counterpart, it appears that the illustration of “The Tyger” does not match the text of the poem. While the poem presents a ferocious tiger that is unable to be “framed”, the illustrated tiger is more timid, without “vivid colors and burning eyes” (Bloom 19). So, it is not him but the tree that dominates the picture which indicates “that the world is overhung by branches of the threatening tree associated with the loss of innocence and death” (Pagliaro 28). Therefore, the illustration shows the bigger picture, the dim colors of the world, and the tiger, with its experience, is just a part of it.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, it can be said that William Blake is remarkable in showing the complexity of human feelings and psychological states. While innocence and experience may be opposed, there is also a lot of different emotions and states in-between. The author stresses that, the same way that good and evil cannot function without one another, innocence cannot function without experience and vice versa. While the children carry the essential naivety, it is undeniable that they will be shaped, influenced and manipulated by experience. Such relationship does not necessarily denote something negative, as presented in the two "Holy Thursday" poems, but, as seen in "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Experience*, it can also mean that the oppressed will finally become aware of their position and fight against it. Since Blake was most concerned with the social changes of the time, he wanted to give the reader an idea and opportunity for salvation. So, it can be said that the poems offer much more that initial assumptions about the good and the evil; they encourage critical thinking, highlight the negatives, direct everyone towards the personal and public improvement, and, essentially, call for the return to initial human innocence.

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