

William Blake

LONDON- from "Songs of Experience" , 1794

*I wandered 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.*

*In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.*

*How the Chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls.*

*But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlot's curse  
Blasts the new born Infant's tear  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.*

Thanks to this poem we can better analyse Blake's CRITICISM.

This poem is a vivid, crude and at the same time VISIONARY representation of London.

The speaker is the poet, and we are guided by him through a realistic and tragic metaphoric walk through "each charter'd street" of London.

We have an urban setting that can reminds us of Dickens's novels, but

Blake wants to denounce the early effects of the Industrial Revolution.

London, in fact, is "chartered" that is to say abused by commercial profits.

This view upon London wants to show us a conflicting reality, where OPPRESSORS and OPPRESSES live in two different worlds that never meet but in EXPLOITATION of the ones on the others.

The author's aim is to develop a growing attack to his society and to this exploitation.

His criticism is directed towards the most important social INSTITUTIONS:

- Church
- Monarchy
- Marriage

These institutions also represent the oppressor's category.

CHURCH frightens, or, better, terrifies ( " *appalls* " ) each Chimney-sweeper (the exploited-children class).

Blake speaks of a " *black'ning Church* " .

The Church is blackning literally because of pollution smoke, but metaphorically Blake wants to communicate that this institution is falling behind with time, it is not modern and, instead of reassuring people, it frightens them.

MONARCHY is another evil of society. Kings make wars and guiltless people have to sacrifice themselves: " *the hapless soldier's sigh runs in blood down Palace walls* " .

The last attacked institution is the MARRIAGE; the marriage is threatened by the " Harlot's curse " that " *blasts the new born Infant's tear* " .

So,

- Chimney-sweepers
- Soldiers
- Harlots (prostitutes)

can represent the category of oppressed.