

William Blake

For Blake reality is the cohesistence of opposites. Is reality can always be seen from two different points of view.

"The Lamb" and "The Tyger" are the two visions of God that man has in life: for a child God is good as a Lamb, for adult God is terrible and powerful. There the two visions of reality!

Blake was born in London in 1757 into a lower-class family. He was an engraver, an illuminator and a painter. He engraved his poems. But they were not appreciated and Blake needed patrons to earn his living. He wasn't really appreciated until the end of 18th century. He died in 1827.

We have already seen the two visions of God. But not only God is seen from two different points of view: everything in life can be seen from the innocent eyes

of a child or from an adult's eyes who has a long experience accumulated in his life. Life analysed from a child's eyes is represented in the first part of Blake's collection "Songs of Innocence and of Experience". This first part, the "Songs of Innocence", was published in 1789. Life analysed from an adult's eyes is represented in the second part, the "Songs of Experience", published in 1794. Innocence is typical of child and man before the Fall from the Garden of Eden. In this state man has a lot of imagination and can see more deeply into the life of things. Imagination is more powerful than reason and is what the poet uses to describe reality.

Blake criticised his society in his poems. He supported the French and the American Revolutions and had affinity with the poor and the oppressed.

The child is very important in both

the collection. In the "Songs of Innocence" he is the symbol of Innocence itself, in the "Songs of Experience" he's the symbol of the oppressed people. The poet is a visionary man who defends the weak and the oppressed denouncing the abuses of those in power. He wants to warn men against the evil they have in themselves. His poetry is addressed also to common people.

His style is simple in terms and syntax, with repetitions and regular rhyme schemes taken from the form of the ballad. There are a lot of personifications, metaphors and symbols.

Blake's originality lies in the use of unconventional symbols and visions and the language that throws the reader in the world of the poem.

"The Chimney-Sweeper" from "Songs of Experience" and from "Songs of Innocence" by William Blake– Commentary and comparison

Luca Palazzo class 5th B 19/09/2011

William Blake produced a huge amount of poems, some of which contained in the two collections "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience". There are a lot of parallelisms in the two collections: one is the poem "The Chimney-Sweeper". In fact there are two poems, one in the "Songs of Innocence" and the other in the "Songs of Experience", which have this title. But in the first collection the life of the chimney-sweeper is seen from a child's eyes (or from the condition of man in the Garden of Eden before the Fall), while in the second it's seen from the perspective of an adult who has already lived a long part of his life and is now able to judge society thanks to his experience.

The poem from the "Songs of Innocence" is organized in six stanzas made up of four lines each one. The poet pretends to be the chimney-sweeper who is the protagonist. When he was very small he was sold to a master by his parents because they weren't probably able to maintain him. Since he was very small, he could scarcely cry: "'weep". This word seems to be the cry of a baby spelt improperly, but the apostrophe tells us that it's the word "sweep" which the chimney-sweeper has to say again and again to attract customers' attention. So the small child has become a chimney-sweeper who "sleeps in the soot" with other children doing his same job. One of them, Tom Dacre, is crying because his head has been shaved, but the protagonist makes him quiet. Then they fall asleep and Tom dreams a fantastic vision: all his friends and him are locked up in black coffins. But an angel comes up and tells them that if they are good in life, they will be loved by God and saved in Heaven. When the small sweepers wake up it's cold and dark because it's very early in the morning. But Tom is happy because he has learnt that if everyone does his duty nobody will be harmed.

The poem is written in a simple language and in the simplest poetic form: the ballad. This perfectly fits the ideals of Romanticism.

Besides the poem launches a very deep message: it doesn't show the life conditions of chimney/s weeper (they are implied in the poem), but it describes the hypocritical hope given to the small children destined to die. The adults and the society of that time (and in some part of the world this behaviour still survives) told them that, even if their life was horrible, they had to be good in order to obtain God's favour. But the hypocrisy behind this hope isn't seen by the innocent eyes of a child, who isn't able to understand it.

On the contrary, this hypocrisy is evident in the poem "the chimney-sweeper" from "Songs of Experience". Here there is an adult that asks to a crying boy alone in the snow where his parents are. While the small chimney-sweeper of the previous poem only points out that he is too young to say "sweep" (he is innocent and ingenuous and doesn't realize he is able only to cry), the adult in this poem immediately understands that the child is so young that should be with his parents. He can't stay alone. But he has been sold to a master and his parents have gone to the church to pray "God and His priest and king". The king of England also is the head of the Anglican church. So Blake's criticism is against the king and the society he represents. In the poem there is implicit the concept of salvation of the previous one. The child was happy to play upon the heath, but his happiness has been broken off sending him to work. Society needs him and makes him live in misery using religion to keep him quiet: he'll be saved if he does his duty. So his parents go to praise God's priest and king (who are the same person) and his misery is turned to a heaven.

Once again the poem is written in a simple language, but there are only three stanzas (made up of four lines each one). The rhythm and the rime are important to create musicality.