

Cím: The Relationship between Adults, Children, and the Divine in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

Jelige: „William Blake”

Introduction

William Blake's (1757-1827) *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is a unique volume of poetry and pictures created around the end of the eighteenth century. It has two parts, *Songs of Innocence*, which was written five years earlier than the other one, *Songs of Experience*. They represent "The two Contrary States of the Human Soul:" the second part, with its experience, reflects on—and sometimes parodies—the naivety of the first one, very often in a bitter tone therefore they are, in many cases, counterparts of one another (Keynes, Introduction 13). The first half, *Innocence* was first published in 1789 as an individual and self-contained piece, created without the idea of any sequel to it. *Experience*, which, in opposition to *Innocence*, was never issued as a separate piece and was mostly written from the point of view of an adult, was published in 1794 (Hilton 198). In *Songs* there is an interaction between the worlds of naive children, rational adults, and even the divine, which has various outcomes in different situations. The ultimate power seems to reside in males, the power of females and children is severely restricted, although it does not mean that they are always passive and never evoke—or try to evoke—changes in the world of Blake's poems (Fox 509-10). In my essay I will contrast certain poems from *Innocence* and *Experience* and show how the relationship between adults and children changes: what kind of effects they have on each other, how they come in touch with divine substances, and whether females and children are really passive. Blake's way to articulate his ideas was not limited to poems; he produced illuminated books in which text and picture constitute a fusion. Thus I will also examine how this form of expression adds a new dimension to his poetry.

Along with several other volumes created by Blake, *Songs* are "illuminated" books. Joseph Viscomi writes that the method of illuminated printing used solely by the poet is similar to traditional engraving: the text and the images were engraved on the surface of copper plates etched with acid; these were later printed on paper. The relief-etching technique was invented by Blake in 1788 but he never exactly explained this method. It enabled him to combine poetry and painting and, thus, to create a more ornamental and grand style. Concerning publishing, these illuminated books were produced as unique limited editions; while from the perspective of an artist, they provided Blake with a great opportunity to make his reputation among a wider audience (see 37-62). The fact that Blake developed and used this unique technique also highlights his creativity and aspiration to create something distinctively original—his pictures and complex beliefs implied in his writings were considered to be greatly unorthodox in the age he lived.

He preferred the “crooked road” of genius; he rejected most of the common mainstream education or religious beliefs of his age. He thought of himself as a visionary prophet who mediates his visions through his art. He put an emphasis on nature, he thought nature was a living world and the earth was a complex living being. It is clear that childhood played an important role in his art; *Songs*, but especially *Innocence* contain numerous poems about children. His great social sensitivity corresponded to this: he condemned the exploitation of children as well as women, the atrocities of war, and the Industrial Revolution. As for the French Revolution, he saw the coming of a liberating “New Age” in it; however, he was disillusioned by later events. Under his peculiar concept, imagination, he understood the living creative principle (see Raine xi-xxxvi). This new approach was a novelty because eighteenth-century empirical philosophers thought that the mind is basically a passive faculty of perception; also, the neoclassical idea of imagination was that it means combination and association. Thus early Romantic poets, including Blake, distinguished themselves from such eighteenth century philosophies by believing that imagination is a fundamentally creative faculty¹ (see Hill 11-23).

Blake’s universe is more complex, though he cannot be easily categorized. He was rather a conflicted intellectual, working during a given period of history, who would refuse any labelling, thus he can be considered to be both a Romantic and an anti-Romantic poet, too (Simpson 172). He challenged the accepted materialistic worldview of the Western culture of his century. His individualistic art and ideas, which were first thought to be innate and autonomous, rely on the mainstream spiritual knowledge and hermeneutic traditions of Western philosophy. He followed the conventions of a deviant society which knew his art surprisingly well along with a great body of knowledge excluded from English culture during the centuries dominated by materialism (see Raine xxi-xxxvi). Thus Blake is often described as a “mystical poet,” which is a rather stereotypical label attached to him, but he never used this actual expression. Instead, he called himself a visionary; art itself was for him a numinous practice. Although his writings are deviant and greatly contain unorthodox ideas, this does not mean that he can fully be described as a “mystical poet.” It is not true either that his works would be exclusive and were made only for people with “certain types of mind” or that he has nothing to offer for the “ordinary reader” (Frye, *Fearful* 7-8). This also shows how complex and elaborate Blake’s writings are.

Blake was influenced by mythologies, mysticism, the Bible, Plato and Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and most importantly, Swedenborgianism. Besides the Greek and Roman mythologies, which were well-known in his age, he was interested in Icelandic, Hindi, Celtic,

or Cabbalistic mythologies as well (Raine xxvii). Christianity obviously plays a central role in his works but he also offers a mystical and unorthodox interpretation of the Bible too, that is, in most cases, very similar to Emanuel Swedenborg's. Swedenborg thought that essential wisdom is concealed in the Bible which is only revealed to those with the knowledge of correspondences: "the Word of the Old Testament includes arcane of heaven . . . deeply hidden from the Christian world. . . . the Word . . . is like a body without a soul [AC, Nos. 1,2]"² (165-6). Blake wrote in "All Religions Are One" that "The Jewish & Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius" ("All Religions are One", Principle 6). The "Poetic Genius is the true Man . . . which by the Ancients was call'd an Angel & Spirit & Demon" (Principle 1st). Thus they both accepted the Bible as divine revelation but they searched for a deeper understanding that is concealed behind mere words and is distinct from the canonized Christian interpretation.

John E. Brown points out that Neo-Platonism, Plotinus's own interpretation of Plato's ideas, had a significant effect on Blake. For example, it is argued that mysticism was the inner source of everything that Blake wrote or painted; the same as for Plato. Similarly to Plotinus's idea, the function of art for Blake is to enounce the Divine. The three divine principles of Plotinus's cosmogony, the "Trinity of Plotinus," are the "ineffable One," the "Divine Intellect (Desire)," and the "World Soul (Reason)." The idea of tracing the centre of all beings in an ineffable One greatly resembles Blake's concept of the Supreme Being. Divine Intellect is similar to Blake's Poetic Genius. Reason is the closest to the soul, it means the quest for "the contemplative possession of Truth"—a firm and deep truth Blake mentions, too: "the true method of knowledge is experiment" ("All Religions are One", "The Argument"). Plotinus's ideas also offer a remarkable link between Platonism and Gnosticism. The Gnostic lore influenced by Oriental mystery cults corresponds with Blake's cosmogony. Its dualistic and diabolistic nature, the concepts of the Creation and the Fall were influential sources for him (see Brown 43-52). Thus Blake's cosmogony roots also in ancient European and eastern philosophies—this corresponds to the eclectic nature of his worldview.

Blake came into contact with Emanuel Swedenborg's teachings at an early age—one of his works was translated into English already in 1769. He became acquainted with all the Swedenborgian theological writings during his life. Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a Swedish philosopher, visionary, and writer, who is often thought of as a predominantly unorthodox or heretic theologian as well. He understood the Bible as an allegory for the journey of the soul in different heavenly realms; also applied Gnostic, Neo-Platonic, and Hermetic principles (see Stanley 13-30). These thoughts greatly influenced Blake throughout all of his art;

Swedenborg's ideas, and Swedenborg himself as well, are mentioned in Blake's writings (Schorer 157-59). For example, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb: his writings are the linen clothes folded up" (Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 43). Just like the Swedish philosopher, he also believed that he was writing at heavenly command (163). Swedenborg maintains that there is an infinite source that is love and thus God itself; this is the underlying unity which connects all beings (Stanley 26): "the Divine in heaven which makes heaven is love, is because love is a spiritual conjunction," and love is also "the inmost vitality of man" (Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell* 14). Blake also emphasised the divinity of humanity, which means that the essential core of the individual is divine and is originated from God (Schorer 169). In "The Divine Image" of *Innocence*, for instance, he writes that, "Mercy Pity Peace and Love \ Is God" ("The Divine Image" ll. 5-6) and "Mercy Pity Peace and Love Is Man" (ll. 6-7) which is also "the human form divine, \ Love Mercy Pity Peace" (ll. 19-20). Therefore, these virtues are both God and men, that is why God and men are essential equivalents. According to Swedenborgianism, human beings are free either to correspond with their higher self (that is essentially godlike) or divert from it—which is the only source of the evil. This way, unaware of heavenly powers, people can live in the belief that they are separated from the divine source: "those who separate the Divine from His Human . . . may have . . . an idea [of Him] as of a man separated from his soul" (Swedenborg, *God, Province, Creation* 23). Under regeneration Swedenborg understands a new, a second birth, the realisation of the God within. The human soul is obviously eternal; life after death is a state in which the inner self is manifested in form (see Stanley 27-9). Blake often criticised or even attacked Swedenborg, he did not find all of his ideas acceptable. For example, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he declares that "Swedenborg has not written new truth . . . he has written all the old falsehoods" (Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 52). As for the doctrines on the evil, the two of them are not of the same opinion. Evil means an "essentially negative . . . misdirected energy" for Blake; while Swedenborg thinks that evil is positive, "the inverse of good" (Schorer 174). Blake seems to have ignored some central Swedenborgian notions, while others keep recurring in his art (177). Undoubtedly, Swedenborgian ideas along with Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism—which also effected the Swedish philosopher himself—are often referred to in Blake's works.

In what follows I want to argue that the belief in the existence of such a divine realm, described by Swedenborg as well, also helps children make their situation better in the cruel world of adults, either through mystical experiences or teachings. I will examine four poems from *Songs* and explain the importance of their illustrations. The two poems entitled "The

Chimney Sweeper” are great examples of Blake’s criticism of social inequalities since they demonstrate an oppressive system, a grave social problem such as child labour—this is what the children in these two poems try escaping from (Hilton 200). In “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Innocence* they succeed in doing so to some extent by coming in touch with the divine realm; while the relative absence of this occurrence effects “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Experience* differently. I would also like to point out how the mother in “The Little Black Boy” of *Innocence* teaches her son about this celestial world, which ideas are present in the poem; to what extent they are similar to what the boy in “The Little Vagabond” of *Experience* tries to explain to his parent.

Contrasting the Two Poems Entitled “The Chimney Sweeper”

The first two works I will analyse are the two poems entitled “The Chimney Sweeper” in *Innocence* and in *Experience*. What I primarily want to summarise though, is some of the general standpoints concerning the two of them. In “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Innocence* a child tells how he was sold to become a sweeper: “my father sold me . . . \ So your chimneys I sweep” (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* ll. 2-4); how he comforted his crying fellow, Tom Dacre: “Hush Tom never mind it” (l. 7). Then he explains how Tom saw a vision of an angel and of a beautiful green place: “And by came an Angel” (l. 13), “down a green plain leaping laughing the run” (l. 15); then how they went to work the next day: “Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm” (l. 23). In “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Experience* first an outsider asks the sweeper, “Where are thy father & mother?” (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Experience* l. 3) who tells about his parents whom he lost: “gone up to the church to pray” (l. 4) and his miserable situation: “They clothed me in the clothes of death” (l. 7). There is no divine spirit present which would give him hope; only the institutionalised form of religion, the church, and the priest are mentioned: “gone to praise God & his Priest & King” (l. 11). Reading the two poems means two different experiences. They can be read on their own and together as well—thus they can create altered meanings (Makdisi 113). The tone of lurking irony in them means that the poems are open to different kinds of interpretations; it can also be said that a dream is no remedy for the children and that the second poem is even more loaded with irony. However, this essay focuses on the uplifting possibility lying in dreams and ideas suggested by heavenly powers.

The main themes of the poems are, on the one hand, social injustice, children forced to do dehumanizing labour, and, on the other hand, religion: it is expressed in the first poem as an experience rather than as an orthodox belief system like in the second one (Kennedy 33). Blake describes the social indignations of his era; it shows something enormously wrong done to children. *Innocence* can inexplicably overcome this situation through a belief in the power of angels, although, in the poem of *Experience*, innocence is not idealised but rather rational (Lamont 256). However, Hilton argues, in “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Innocence* Blake ideologically uses the language to justify orders unfair for children. Little Tom Dacre is the “incarnation of the lamb” so he is a helpless, passive, and innocent being, and the other sweeper’s dream of an angel is not comforting but useless, a sheer religious nonsense (Hilton 200). Thus this point of view emphasises the irony of the poems. “The Chimney Sweeper” is often put in parallel with “The Little Black Boy” when read from the point of view of race

and identity. In such cases it is said that being “white” is not only a question of race but also of caste (Makdisi 113): in *Experience* the sweeper is referred to as “a little black thing among the snow” “The Chimney Sweeper,” *Experience* l. 1). Frye also argues that the two poems of *Innocence* are similar: the little black boy and the chimney sweeper boy are modulations of the symbol of “the oppression of fallen man” (212). This aspect concentrates on their outer feature that they both look “black:” one because of his skin colour, the other because of his sooty clothes.

“The Chimney Sweeper” is the seventh poem in *Innocence*; it has six stanzas and each of them are made up of four lines. It comes after “The Little Black Boy” and “The Blossom;” it is followed by “The Little Boy Lost” and “The Little Boy Found.” “The Chimney Sweeper” and “The Little Black Boy” obviously bear some similarities. “The Blossom” echoes the atmosphere of spring; while “The Little Boy Lost” resonates with the child’s agony who goes astray in the dark—there is hopelessness in it, just like in “The Chimney Sweeper.” “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Innocence* immediately starts with a tragic happening reported by a child: “my mother died” while he was still “very young” (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* l. 1). As a result, he was sold by his father to become a chimney sweeper. His mother’s death meant the end of a nurturing relationship that small children have towards their mothers, it even resulted in his being sold and thus cast out of a safe environment, a family. He is passive, he cannot act against his father’s will. He probably lived in a relatively harmonious family relationship because of having both parents and by losing them he is pushed into a world full of conflicting powers. All this happens when he was small, when he “Could scarcely cry ‘weep’” (l. 3). The similarity of the two words, weep and sweep, emphasises the dreadful nature of what happens to the child. Besides him and his parents, there is even a fourth person in the first stanza, it is a “you” in the last line: “your chimneys I sweep” (l. 4). This “you” could refer to the reader as well which would make the poem more touching and more direct. It brings the reader back to the sometimes cruel world of eighteenth-century London where the little chimney sweeper could sweep the readers’ chimneys—hence he would be inferior to the reader as well. Ironically, he makes chimneys cleaner while he himself has to sleep in dirt: “in soot I sleep” (l. 4).

In the second stanza the little boy mentions a fellow chimney sweeper of his, “Tom Dacre who cried when his head, \ That curl’d like a lamb’s back, was shav’d” (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* ll. 5-6). It is argued that the name Dacre is the transposition of the letters in the word “dark”; thus his name could be the symbol of his dark fate (Keynes, *Commentary* 136). Tom’s fleece-like hair can be the symbol of innocence and Jesus as the Lamb, the

“Lamb of God” (Peschel 753). The image of the lamb evokes another poem in *Innocence*, namely *The Lamb*. These can suggest that he is also a pure creature who is sacrificed—in this case, deprived of his white hair, his peculiarity. Besides purity, the white colour of his hair can refer to getting old, and can also mean that his tragic fate made his soul aged. He is also passive and helpless, just like the other boy in the first verse, he is subjected to other people’s power. But the other boy tries to comfort Tom Dacre by saying, “the soot cannot spoil your white hair” (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* l. 8). He is caring and protective towards his little peer despite the disappointment in his earthly father (Connolly and Levine 262). Hence he tries to make him feel better, he wishes to make their terrible condition more comfortable so he takes action and becomes active compared to Tom; he still cannot help their overall situation. The two of them are around the same age and experiencing the same crisis, they are peers.

In the third stanza it is night, Tom “was quiet, & . . . \ was a sleeping, he had such a sight” (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* ll. 9-10); in his vision he sees “thousands of sweepers . . . \ lock’d up in coffins of black” (ll. 11-12). This also sounds dreamlike because of the vast number, “thousands of” them (l. 11). Some names of other fellow chimney sweepers are mentioned such as “Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack”—the boy calling them by his nicknames supposes a close relationship between them, they are equal, and they are probably friends, who know each other well (l. 11). According to Tom’s vision, it is as if they were all dead because of being “lock’d up in coffins of black” (l. 12). However, sweeping a chimney might be similar for the children because of the narrow places and the soot; maybe his everyday experiences are reflected in his dream. But most importantly, Tom enters into a different world; the new scene of happenings is outside reality, it is inside his own reality, the realm of dreams. Northrop Frye argues that children live in the “intelligibility of innocence, and they have an imaginative recklessness which derives from that”—thus in Tom’s case as well (42). According to Blake, there are three worlds: “the world of vision, the world of sight and the world of memory” (Frye, *Fearful* 26). The first one is “the world we create” and the second one is “the world we live in” (l. 26). Therefore, Tom Dacre goes from the world he lives in to the world he creates. Under vision Blake understands “the creative power of the artist” that is, “the goal of all freedom, energy and wisdom” (l. 25). Maybe Tom is trying to regain his lost freedom in his visionary dream; he is also similar to an artist because of his coming in touch with a visionary realm for the time of a dream he sees at night.

In the fourth verse Tom Dacre’s vision continues; an Angel comes by “who had a bright key” and “open’d the coffins” to free the sweepers (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* ll.

13-14). This episode evokes a biblical story. In Matthew's gospel it is written that after his crucifixion, Jesus Christ's body was taken down from the cross and taken to a sepulchre; when Mary and Mary Magdalena came the following day they saw that "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door" (Matthew 28:2). The biblical reference makes the chimney sweepers similar to Jesus; in the second stanza there is already such a simile when Tom is described being similar to the Lamb of God and thus to Christ. This suggests that they are also innocent ones who also suffer just like Jesus; and they would resurrect and enter heaven, too. They turn into symbols of outrageous torment (Peschel 753). The world shown by Blake's *Innocence* is where divine imagination is presented as an infant: in Christianity it is denoted by "the infant Jesus, the gentle and innocent Lamb of God"—not only Tom and his peers are put in parallel with Jesus but his vision, too; that is divine imagination (Frye, *Fearful* 235). The expressions "angel" or "spirit" in Blake stand for "imagination functioning as inspiration," which corresponds to the idea of Tom Dacre being similar to an artist (38). The Angel—coming in touch with such a divine substance—is inspirational for him; this clearly turns out in the last stanza when, after waking from the dream, "Tom was happy & warm" ("The Chimney Sweeper," *Innocence* l. 23). According to Swedenborg, "angels have power" because "the will and understanding of man are ruled by the Lord through angels and spirits," hence the little boy's vision is a kind of "deus ex machina," too (Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell* 228).

As the dream continues, he sees himself and the others "laughing . . . run, \ And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun" ("The Chimney Sweeper," *Innocence* ll. 15-16). This beautiful place, the "green plain" can also represent heaven they would enter (l. 16). The green environment is opposite to their everyday environment, the unhealthy city, the dirty streets, the soot they work and sleep in. They also "wash in a river," they clean themselves from the dirt but this can denote obtaining spiritual clarity as well (l. 16). This scene is also similar to how Jesus was baptized in the river: "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan" (Mark 1:9). Thus the chimney sweepers are once again put in parallel with Christ. Then they "shine in the Sun"—here sun is highlighted with capital "S" therefore the sun probably has an outstanding meaning in this context (l. 16). This is an explicit example of Blake using a Swedenborgian symbol. According to Swedenborg, there are two suns, the "celestial sun which radiates God's "heat and light" (love and wisdom), while the other one, the natural sun is only a reflection of this (Schorer 165). Hence in this heaven-like state they are enlightened by God's grace, just like the Angel, God appears as their benefactor in opposition with the adults who make them endure cruelty in the real world.

In the fifth verse the chimney sweepers are “naked & white,” free and clean from the soot (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* l. 17). All “their bags” are “left behind;” bags can symbolize problems, sadness, or bad experiences they carried with themselves—now they are free from those burdens as well (l. 17). This is why they “rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind;” they feel weightless without the troubles they used to suffer from; being up in the sky can mean that they are in heaven and closer to God (l. 18). Then the Angel tells something important to Tom: “if he’d be a good boy, \ He’d have God for his father (ll. 19-20). Since God is obviously very often referred to as the Father, he—and most likely the others, too, including the narrator child—would have a replacement for his earthly father who probably also sold him, similarly to the narrator boy. God was also Jesus’s father so this is one more reference to the notion that these children are like Jesus. According to Swedenborg, “To speak with the angels of heaven is granted only to those who are in truths from good”—this corresponds with these children’ innocence (Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell* 250). This is where the vision gets completely unfolded: the sweepers become entirely free, Tom Dacre finds a new father and the Angel, as a patron, gives hope to him.

In the sixth and last stanza the dream ends: “so Tom awoke” and they “rose in the dark” (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* l. 21). This dark place is in opposition with the previous “green plain” where they could “shine in the Sun” (ll. 15-16). Thus this can mean that there is no divine presence in this world, only in the vision he had. They go to work with their bags, the ones they left behind in the dream—“got with our bags & brushes to work”—so they symbolically take on all the problems and miseries of their earthly lives (l. 22). Tom was still “happy & warm,” even though “the morning was cold” (l. 23). He still preserved in his soul the warmth of the light that shone down on him in his visionary dream. Concluding from the Angel’s words, the narrator boy adds in the very end, “So if all do their duty they need not fear harm” (l. 24). It can be supposed that there is a close friendship between him and Tom Dacre since he was told about the miraculous dream. Overall, he cannot protest against the wrong done to them, he cannot see their situation from the outside, only from the inside. He does not complain, he only cares for the dream: the child might be logically limited but he can understand angels (Lamont 256). Thus the boy only tries to make their situation better by comforting his friend, Tom, and by finding hope in a dream. These children might seem to be passive compared to adults from the outside, even though they actively try to make a difference by helping out each other and by clinging to a vision, a personal religious experience, that gives them hope in their misery. Blake also draws a strong social criticism in this poem by describing the child chimney sweepers’ lives.

The happiest scene of “The Chimney Sweeper” in *Innocence* is when the Angel unlocks the chimney sweepers’ coffins in Tom Dacre’s vision—this is what the plate illustrates (see Fig. 1). The Angel is a tall and slender figure in a long white robe with a glory around the head, who helps the next boy get out of the black coffin. The others seem to be celebrating their freedom, they are running, hugging, and holding each other’s hands in their rejoicing. The sky is bright and the whole plate is dominated by warm shades of colours, which emphasises the joyousness of coming in touch with such a divine creature as an angel (see Keynes, *Commentary* 136). Since *Songs* is not only a volume of poetry but a series of such vignettes, it is vital to mention the interaction of his texts and pictures. According to Northrop Frye, it corresponds to traditional emblem-books to some extent; although there is a significant feature of *Songs* which differentiates it from the others and makes it the best emblem-book of English literature. Such a book is largely literary, which means that the text is of main importance; the pictorial design is the direct illustration of the verbal content, a graphic commentary of what is written. Blake’s writings and pictures do not have this kind of allegorical connection. Instead, he adds “a new dimension of subtlety and power” to the text—the meaning of the poem is extended. This is why *Songs* is not a children’s book originally; the complex meaning of the text combined with pictures is far beyond the level of picture-books (see Frye, *Poetry* 36-7). The illustrations of *Innocence* and *Experience* reflect on and parody each other just as well as the texts; they go through a “pictorial metamorphosis” (38). The plates belonging to the two poems entitled “The Chimney Sweeper” are obvious examples of this as well: the pictures belonging to the first one show a crowded and happy scene from the poem and are full of warm colours while the in the design in *Experience* a lonely boy can be seen in a cold wintry environment.

It is obvious that Blake was thinking in terms of plates from the very beginning when creating his art; he worked on texts and pictures at the same time (Frye, *Poetry* 38). This is what T. S. Eliot calls “schizophrenia:” to have great talent in both painting and writing, which is quite rare since, usually, only one of the talents are exceptional, the other one becomes subordinated and remains as hobby (35). Since Blake believed in the divine origin of his art—just as well as Swedenborg—he claimed that he put his poems down unaltered at the direct command of heavenly powers and painted the visions he saw precisely. Of course, this is not completely true; his notebook contains many drafts with corrections or even different versions of the works. Moreover, he borrowed a lot from other artists from his time and earlier centuries or millennia as well—just like any other painter or writer. This is why he was not as much an isolated and independent figure as he was considered to be in the nineteenth century

(Blunt 207). Blake probably stated that he followed the instant suggestions of his spirit to emphasize his originality.

The unusual connection of poems and pictures can be seen in the entwining lines of text and drawing which gives a special reading experience to the readers of the illuminated books. Reading Blake's illuminated texts greatly expands both the mind and the eye. They support a fuller perceptual understanding in contrast to the normal cognitive reading which is rather a passive form of thinking; it is "ontologically restrictive" (Bigwood 307). Reading Blake's illuminated texts brings the eye to a sort of complete sensitive contact and turns the reading into a surprisingly aesthetic experience. This happens due to the eye being forced to balance between reading the text and seeing the absorbing drawing at the same time. The eyes are not rigidly focusing; a more undefined and horizontal vision becomes possible. Hence the "reading" and "seeing" eyes are integrated (309) and the synchronized reading and seeing gives the page an extra meaning besides the pleasant aesthetic enjoyment. This is what Blake calls the "marriage of contraries," when the textual and drawing lines rely on a common ground and entwine during the practice of reading (310). Blake's handwritten words, which greatly vary in size and form, help in reviving the prelinguistic way of perceiving written language as a thread of lines. His lines turn into leaves, benches, flowers, or tendrils. For example, there are sprouting wheat lines in "Spring" of *Innocence*, which spread all around in the page. The many dynamically twisted lines remind the reader of the dance and music the poem is actually about (see Bigwood 307-14). The title letters in both of "The Chimney Sweeper" poems become twisting tendrils as well. The two illustrations express very different thoughts. In case of "The Chimney Sweeper" in *Experience* the illustration is factual, simply showing the boy walking on the street with a huge bag (see Fig. 2). His clothes are blackish, the street is white with snow, he is looking at the dark sky. But, most importantly, the chimney sweeper is alone without his peers who are present only in the previous illustration. The whole plate gives a greyish and cold impression that highlights the harsh life of the boy (see Keynes, *Commentary* 146). These images are a vital part of Blake's poems; the practice of reading the illuminated books includes the exchanging between reading the text and images, writes Saree Makdisi. Blake's geniality is shown here: while reading his books, one can stumble upon pictures, figures, ornaments, and of course, the text as well. Therefore, in order to fully experience his art, one has to take both the illustrations and texts into consideration (see 110-32).

Just like in *Innocence*, "The Chimney Sweeper" is the seventh poem in *Experience*, too. This is because this second one is a sequel to the previous one. It consists of three stanzas—

half of the one in *Innocence*—each of the stanzas are of four lines. It is preceded by “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found;” while it is followed by “Nurses Song.” “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found” together form an extensive ballad about the cycle of life; while “Nurses Song” is a parody of the poem with the same title in *Innocence* (Keynes, *Commentary* 145-47). “The Chimney Sweeper” begins with an outsider looking at the boy and all the given person perceives is “A little black thing among the snow” (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Experience* l. 1). The little sweeper’s sooty clothes are in contrast with the white snow so his dark appearance is even more striking. He is poor and not treated as a human being—“my father sold me”—that is why he appears in the colour black (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Innocence* l. 2). Snow gives a cold feeling; it can also represent other people he could be walking among; the others being superior to him in class—because they are white—who are indifferent to this gross social inequality. He is still “Crying ‘weep, weep,’” hence there is probably not much difference between the time of the two poems in the two volumes; he is still a small child (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Experience* l. 2). But now it is even mentioned that he cries “in notes of woe” which makes the verse more grim (l. 2). His parents also come in question at the beginning of the poem, just like in *Innocence*, they play a very important role in what the child is exposed to. In this case he is asked by the outsider, “Where are thy father & mother, say?” (l. 3). This also shows that the chimney sweeper is probably still just a little child who looks lost and lonely and should be around his parents. The answer, “They are both gone up to the church to pray” sounds ambiguous (l. 4). It is also like a white lie children are told, meaning that the parents are dead in real. Blake hence highlights the absurdity of society: the parents are gone to church; the Church and the society overlook such cruelty done to innocent children (Keynes, *Commentary* 146). This sort of experience of religion is very far from the benevolence of the Angel who sets the chimney sweepers free, and also from God, who accepts them to a state of grace. In the first stanza it is still a question whether the little sweeper in *Experience* is the same as the narrator boy or Tom Dacre in *Innocence*. It might not matter though, since each of them has a tragic life, they could all represent every child forced to dehumanizing labour in general.

In the second stanza the boy explains that he “was happy upon the heath, \ And smil’d among the winter’s snow;” so if he is a boy who was involved in the mysterious experience the previous poem described, he still keeps the warmth of the Sun (“The Chimney Sweeper,” *Experience* ll. 5-6). Here the Celestial Sun is referred to which, in Swedenborg’s understanding, radiates God’s love. He is even clothed “in the clothes of death”—he is wearing black clothes—which seems to be the contrast of the light of the sun; and he was

taught “to sing the notes of woe” that refers back to him crying “weep weep” (ll. 7-8). His fate seems miserable from the outside, he is unable to make a change in his life but he has the hope the dream gave him thus he changes on the inside. This is similar to what Swedenborg calls regeneration, the rebirth of the soul, and because of the underlying divinity of men, the realisation of the God within.

In the third and last stanza he tells that, because of not breaking down but staying cheerful, “I am happy, & dance & sing,” others suppose it is not ruthlessness to sell children to become chimney sweepers: “They think they have done me no injury” (ll. 9-10). They—people in general or probably the parents—“are gone to praise God & his Priest & King” (l. 11). They are “gone up to the church to pray” as it is mentioned in the first verse as well (l. 4). This means that they agree with the unjust ways of society, they support an oppressive system. “God & his Priest” maintain the Church, together with the “King” they maintain society (l. 11). This institution of religion, which reinforces ruthlessness, is not the same kind of religion as the impression Tom Dacre had about God and his Angels; the two are contradictory. The “God & his Priest & King” thus appear to be the antithesis of the holy trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (l. 11). They even “make up a heaven of” their “misery”—this “heaven” is not the heaven Tom and his peers rejoiced in “The Chimney Sweeper” in *Innocence* (l. 12). This is not a real heaven because it means the pursuance of material wealth and power and feeds on subjugation—the two are opposites, too. The end of the poem is hence rather bitter. It is the little chimney sweeper himself who expresses this obvious social criticism; despite his tender age, he seems to be well aware of his situation. He is passive, he cannot change this, but he can keep a mental attitude, and rely on the hope the vision gave him previously. The vision let him have a glimpse into the beauty of the divine world; realising what both Blake and Swedenborg emphasised on as well, that the essential core of the individual is divine thus what he saw can be found in his soul as well, might serve as comfort to him. This idea is likewise present in “The Little Black Boy” of *Innocence* and “The Little Vagabond” of *Experience*; just as well as similar characters—the child, mother, father, and God—and motifs such as the sun or religion versus divine world.

The Similarities of “The Little Black Boy” and “The Little Vagabond”

The other two poems I am going to examine are “The Little Black Boy” in *Innocence* and “The Little Vagabond” in *Experience* which can both be connected to similar themes present in “The Chimney Sweeper” poems in *Innocence* and *Experience*: divinity or the interaction between children and parents. First, I would like to review some general ideas about the background of these poetical pieces. “The Little Black Boy” of *Innocence* is about an African mother teaching her son about God and divine love, sitting under a tree “before the heat of day” (“The Little Black Boy” l. 6). She explains that the people’s purpose is to “learn to bear the beams of love” and all people are equal regardless of skin colour, they are just covered either in a “black” or a “white cloud” (ll. 14-23). In the end, all would rejoice “round the tent of God” when they are free from those clouds (l. 24). “The Little Vagabond” of *Experience* is about a youngster talking to his mother, suggesting that they should not stay in the church but in the “Ale-house” that is “healthy & pleasant & warm” (“The Little Vagabond” l. 2). In his view, the church should be more lively and then he would not “ever once wish from the Church to stray” (l. 8). He puts the grimness of the church and the joyfulness of the Ale-house in opposition and thinks that God would be “rejoicing to see” them happy and “Would have no more quarrel with the Devil” (ll. 13-15). Both poems offer a personal and subjective interpretation of religion and unusual ways of praising God.

Just like in “The Chimney Sweeper,” in “The Little Black Boy” of *Innocence* the use of language rationalizes factors oppressive for children, argues Nelson Hilton. He approaches the poem from a rather ironic point of view. He states that the mother’s lesson initiates the idea of the utter inconsistency of racial colouring; it is all a strong ideological betray. The black boy’s hope that the white boy would love him in the end is also pathetic and a hopeless wish (see 200-1). Another similarity between “The Chimney Sweeper” and “The Little Black Boy” is the way skin colour and identity are written about: they are not only a question of race but caste, too, thus “The Little Black Boy” is not an inevitably racist writing (Makdisi 113). The major ideas of the poem are bodies being clouds, the equality before God and the difficulty of accepting God’s light. These metaphors that Blake uses seem to be simple at first sight but there are unnoticeable shifts between their levels of understanding, which makes the poem difficult to follow. For example, it is not always clear whether the word “cloud” refers to the little boy’s black skin or people’s bodies in general (Adler 412-15). It is also argued that this poem corresponds with the earlier period of the campaign of The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, which was formed in 1787 (Erdman 243). When the first typographical

edition of *Songs* was published, “The Little Vagabond” in *Experience* was left out since it was considered to be too rebellious against authority. The vagabond lives already in the world of experience, he has a naive concept about the ideal way of existence: “if at the Church they would give us some Ale” (“The Little Vagabond” l. 5). He thinks of God as a loving father, just like the little black boy (Keynes, *Commentary* 150). He argues that worship would be, if not impossible, then enforced, if one is cold or one’s stomach is not filled with food, while it should be spontaneous. The poem is an unprompted expression of gratitude for the fine breakfast God gives him (Damon 368). Hence the concept of religion and God, the relationship between mother and son also play an important role in both poems of *Innocence* and *Experience*.

“The Little Black Boy” is the fifth poem in *Innocence*; it consists of seven stanzas, four lines each. It is preceded by “The Lamb” in which the lamb and the child can be the symbols of innocence and Jesus as well. It is followed by “The Blossom” that is about the season spring, which is full of life (Keynes, *Commentary* 134). After this poem comes “The Chimney Sweeper” which obviously bears resemblance to “The Little Black Boy”—probably this is why they are located close to each other in the volume. The poem immediately starts with the child mentioning his mother as “My mother;” he is probably still very small, dependent and inseparable from her (“The Little Black Boy” l. 1). Then he mentions his place of birth, “the southern wild;” these two are essential and important when one defines himself (l. 1). He further develops his own process of identification with stating “I am black,” then there is an important “but” because he claims that “my soul is white” (l. 2). At first sight, this can appear to be a contradiction, in the boy’s process of thought, an irresolvable conflict of light and darkness. It is also pointed out that “the English child” is “White as an angel,” this clearly refers to the outer features of the white boy; comparing him to an angel highlights the innocence of children in general, it evokes the world of the divine (l. 3). There is another “But” introducing the next parallel, “I am black” that he otherwise already mentioned previously (l. 4). Thus they are similar, both are in the state of innocence: the black boy’s soul is white and the English child is like an angel. But only the English boy’s “whiteness” is visible from the outside. But for those who see under the surface and know the Swedenborgian symbolism, the divine origin of the black boy becomes visually obvious as well: he says, he is “as if bereav’d of light” (l. 4). This means that his dark skin makes it possible for him to bear the heat and light coming from the sun (Adler 412). It can be argued that here Blake refers to Swedenborg’s two suns, the natural one and the celestial sun that

radiates God's love (Schorer 165). Thus the little black boy can "bear the beams of love" even better and this is visible on his skin as well ("The Little Black Boy" l. 14).

The second stanza begins with the same two words as the first one: "My mother," which further enhances how strong the bondage between mother and son is (l. 5). The image of a very much loving mother unfolds in this stanza and is present in the whole poem as well: they sit down, she takes her child on her lap and kisses him "before the heat of day" (l. 6). Here the heat of the sun can refer to the celestial sun, God's wisdom and love as well; divine symbols are present around them. They are "underneath a tree," this can be a reference to the Tree of Knowledge in the Bible; the mother and son can be an allegory of Mary and Jesus (l. 5): "And pointing to the east" she begins to teach his son, this is what this verse introduces (l. 8). She is pointing to the east, to the rising sun, thus to the source of knowledge.

In the third stanza she tells that, "on the rising sun: there God does live \ And gives his light and gives his heat away" and thus reinforces the Swedenborgian theory of the sun radiating God's love; this is a clear proof of how much Blake was influenced by the Swedish philosopher's ideas (ll. 9-10). She explains that all living beings, "flowers and trees and beasts and men receive" these sunrays that they experience as either "Comfort in morning" or as "joy in the noon day" (ll. 11-12). As the intensity of the heat of the sun changes, as it gets warmer when rising higher in the sky, so does the affection change as its celestial body exhales. She only emphasises the positive features of the sun; drought, fire or the sunburnt skin that it may cause are not mentioned. This is because the little boy is still childlike and naive, he lives in the "unfallen world" of innocence (Frye, *Fearful* 42). But "the fallen child of the sun" is of the innermost symbols of "the oppression of fallen man" and "The Little Black Boy" in *Innocence* is a modulation of this symbol (212). This can mean that the child is yet unaware of the confines of his body, his black skin, the unfair preconceptions of society that were imposed on dark-skinned people in the eighteenth century as well. A black person was not only the symbol of the "fallen" man because of being "put on earth" but also because of the unequal man-made social order ("The Little Black Boy" l. 13). This is what Blake calls the reader's attention to; his text is not "racist" as it was claimed by some critics (Makdisi 113). It merely confronts the reader with sad reality and, because of his great social sensitivity, he probably hoped to change the way people were thinking.

The mother reveals in the fourth stanza what she thinks the mission of a person is: "we are put on earth a little space" in order to "learn to bear the beams of love" (ll. 13-14). This Earth is called "a little space," probably she is aware of the immense size of the universe which proves that she is a wise and knowledgeable woman (l. 13). She refers to the heat and

love coming from the celestial sun and to the fact that it is something extraordinary to be able to embrace such divine substances. This can mean that the more one is able to accept divine love, the closer the person is to God. Then follows one of the central ideas of the poem: “these black bodies and this sun-burnt face \ Is but a cloud” (ll. 15-16). The idea that bodies are clouds thwarting the light from the soul goes back to Plato and Dante. Here “cloud” can either refer to black skin or to the body, or to both at the same time (Adler 412-13). The other metaphor for bodies is “a shady grove,” a forest that does not really let in sunrays, just like clouds (“The Little Black Boy” l. 16).

In the next stanza she goes on clarifying that this “cloud will vanish” if “our souls have learn’d the heat to bear” (ll. 17-18). This can mean that when one accomplishes the task of bearing divine love during life, free from the confines of the body, one becomes pure and we can “hear his voice” because he becomes free from bodily ears that apprehend only earthly sounds (l. 18). There God calls on them to “come out from the grove” which is a reference to the previous stanza where the body was described as “a shady grove” (ll. 16-19). Thus God calls on people, who are already free, to enter heaven: “round my golden tent like lambs rejoice” (l. 20). These souls are compared to a lamb that is the symbol of innocence; leaving their “clouds” behind can make them become part of a divine realm, hence regain the state of innocence. But this passage does not necessarily refer to death; it can mean that the “cloud,” as an appearance, conceals people’s true selves, and that everyone is equal before God. If someone comprehends this fact, he becomes able to bear this truth, one can live with this heavenly state of mind and thus regain innocence in one’s soul. Therefore the mother does try to make a change in her own way by teaching his son something that emphasises goodness in the world. Her spiritual efforts can be connected to the Blakean idea that the essential core of the individual is divine regardless of superficialities.

The mother’s lesson ends with the sixth stanza. The little boy ascertains, “Thus did my mother say, and kissed me” (l. 21). His relationship to his mother is affectionate and nurturing, she gives both love and wisdom to his son. He receives a special moral and religious education; his mother talks about God, divine love, and the equality of all people. She does this naturally with love and care, without mentioning any churches or priests—this corresponds with Blake’s unorthodox understanding of religion, the opposition of institutionalised religion. It is obvious that the child listens to his mother and respects her because, concluding from what he has been told, he says, “And thus I say to little English boy;” he thinks such teachings are worth sharing (l. 22). He sums up the most important point to the white boy, that they will also rejoice “round the tent of God” when “I from black and he

from white cloud free” (ll. 23-24). This can mean that they do not only have to become free from their own “clouds” (bodies) but they also have to learn to see the others—the Other—without the misleading “cloud” as well: people look different on the surface but God’s mercy and divine love makes them equal.

In the seventh and last stanza the little black boy offers to the English boy that he will “shade him from the heat, till he can bear” the “heat” that is here expressed by leaning “in joy upon our father’s knee” (ll. 25-26). He wants to help the English boy until he also learns the truth the black boy was told by his mother and becomes able to accept God’s love. Therefore he initiates a friendship by telling the English child about the divine power and encourages him to accept this and he even offers help. The last two lines of the poem are ambiguous; it is not clear whether “he” refers to the English boy or to God. If to the former, then it means that the black boy becomes similar to the English child who will love him because of this similarity. This is a debatable interpretation since the African child’s goal is to teach him about them being the same inside and thus no one would need to be similar to anyone to be loved; God’s love—the heat radiating from the celestial sun—must be unconditional. The “silver hair”—the English boy’s hair—would be appropriate only if it is presumed that a long time passes between the children getting to know each other and his learning to bear the “heat” (l. 27). But if “he” refers to God, and the black boy “strokes his silver hair,” then it is like a gesture between father and son (l. 27). God appears as a loving father all through the poem. His grey hair denotes age and wisdom. Then the child says he becomes like his father; “and then he will love me” probably refers to the time when he becomes like God, he can show an example to the English boy who will then completely recognize the divine in him (l. 28). Thus with God’s help the little black boy can evoke a positive inner change in the English boy.

In the first plate of “The Little Black Boy” the mother can be seen with her child sitting under a tree looking at the rising sun; the scene is described in the second stanza: “My mother taught me underneath a tree, \ . . . pointing to the east” (“The Little Black Boy” ll. 5-8). Here the sun represents God hence all three entities, parent, child and divinity are present. The caring mother is holding her child who is pointing up to the sky. The warmth of the sun—God’s love—is depicted by dark purplish and yellow shades. The illustration, which takes up one third of the page besides the four stanzas that are on it, is thus relatively literal and is close to the text. The textual and drawing lines are interwoven in the title and frame the text.

It can be supposed that this poem was partly inspired by a book put out around 1770, more than ten years before *Innocence*, called *A Narrative of the Most remarkable*

Particularities of the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince. It is similar to “The Little Black Boy” because there is an African mother and child in it who converse about divinity. Conversing while sitting under an African tree is probably a widespread image in African discourse. This motif also appears in William Cole’s poem titled “Thoughts in Exile” (1864); perhaps both Blake’s poem and Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* inspired the nineteenth-century poet (Kozlowski 4). The little black boy’s figure might have been inspired by a painting made by a Swedish portraitist, Carl von Breda. He painted Peter Panah, a black African ex-slave supported and educated by C. B. Wadstörn, a Swedenborgian humanitarianist. The painting depicts Wadstörn teaching Panah. The Royal Academy presented the picture in 1789, the very year Blake’s first copy of *Innocence* was published. Perhaps the poet saw the painting which served as a source of inspiration for him (Ankarsjö 123).

The second plate is also framed by tendrils which grow out of the painting. God appears as a good shepherd, Jesus Christ, he is sitting under a tree with the children just like the mother in the first illustration. The halo around his head is the sun in the background which underlines his divine origin. He represents both the parent and the divine for the children; the earthly mother is not present since she disappears around the end of the poem. The grazing flock of sheep in the background can represent tranquillity and God’s followers. The crook in the Jesus-like figure’s hand underlines that he is their spiritual leader. There is also a river in the lower part of the picture in front of the tree and the figures. In some later copy of this plate the river is wider which can sign that the English child had a more difficult journey to take—to find his way to God—than it seemed earlier. Such slight differences are important to those who study the variations of illuminated copies. Although it is unlikely that Blake wanted to attach new meaning through minor changes, they must have been accidental instead; he strived for the harmony of all the copies (Essick 860). It can be said that the last stanza focuses on the black boy protecting the white child, “I’ll shade him from the heat,” while the picture highlights the result of the process, the moment when the English child has already accepted God as a father and is leaning on his knees (“The Little Black Boy” l. 25). Thus it seems that the black boy is of secondary importance in the picture in contrast to the text which creates tension between the two. This is one of the contradictions contained by Blake’s illuminated works when writings and illustrations do not entirely correspond to each other (see Csirmaz 1-3). It is more than possible though that such oppositions are intentional—the poet did not “illustrate” his writings as creators of emblem books did; pictures were to add new aspects to the text.

The pictures of “The Little Vagabond” correspond to the text in a less literal way than the illustrations of “The Little Black Boy.” In the lower picture there is the little vagabond’s family sitting around a fire in the open air. Strictly speaking, this does not match the poem; only the church and the ale-house are mentioned. The boy does talk about a “pleasant fire” but he wants it to be in the church, not in the open air. In addition, more family members can be seen in the picture; in the text only the mother is mentioned besides the little vagabond as family (Gillham 132). Thus he appears to have a whole family in contrast to the black child who has his mother only. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a vagabond is someone “who has no home or job and who travels from place to place” (OED 1691). The vagabond in the poem is in opposition with this definition since he seems to have a whole family or a mother at least. In the upper picture there is an old man comforting a younger one in what seems to be a forest. The two might be God and the Devil; the older man has a halo around his head which denotes his holiness and divinity. The younger man’s skin is reddish; a colour often connected to hell and thus the Devil because it is also the colour of fire. It appears as if there was a twisted horn on his head as well; it is not obvious though since he can be seen from profile (Gillham 132). The forest around them represents the materialism of *Experience* but it is partly dissolved by the old man’s golden light; the illustration is the representation of heavenly forgiveness. God appears here as a loving father, an old one unlike on the plate of “The Little Black Boy” where he is shown as Jesus (Keynes, *Commentary* 150). The poem is surrounded by tangling lines as well, which turn into vine-branches referring to the pleasures of drinking wine or birds which can stand for freedom the little vagabond desires, as it turns out from the text, too.

“The Little Vagabond” is the seventeenth poem in *Experience* and consists of four stanzas, four lines each. It is preceded by “The Garden of Love” in which love and repression come into conflict. It is followed by “London” that is one of Blake’s best-known poems; it describes the harshness of life in eighteenth-century London. The title of “The Little Black Boy” and “The Little Vagabond” are clearly similar, but since the latter is already in the world of *Experience*, he is most likely already an adolescent boy. The poem begins with the little vagabond complaining to his mother that “the Church is cold” (“The Little Vagabond” l. 1). It would seem obvious that “Church” refers to the building where people worship God; he evokes the atmosphere of vast and cold churches built of stone. But since this word is with a capital letter, it can denote the Church, the institution of organized religion. Thus saying that it is “cold” might also denote the poet’s criticism of this form of Christianity already at the very beginning of the poem. Then the boy contrasts the church with the “Ale-house” that “is

healthy & pleasant & warm;” he contrasts what he takes to be bigoted religion with earthly pleasures he would prefer (l. 2). He knows that this would be where he belongs, “where I am used well,” and this would not be appropriate to the strictness of religion, “Such usage in heaven will never do well” (ll. 3-4). The mother is also present at the very beginning of the poem, it opens with “Dear Mother, dear mother” but the vagabond, unlike the little black boy, stands up and speaks his mind instead of trying to define himself according to his origins (l. 1).

In the next stanza he further explains his views on the Church and wonders, what “if at the Church they would give us some Ale” (l. 5). He would also want “a pleasant fire our souls to regale”—in the literal sense he would like the church building to be warm like the tavern so that it would become a cosy place (l. 6). Although “fire” for the soul can mean passion, love, ideas or wisdom the soul can feed on. This sounds similar to what in “The Little Black Boy” is referred to as God “gives his light and gives his heat away,” hence, the little vagabond wishes for such unorthodox teachings instead of the lifeless sermons (“The Little Vagabond” l. 10). He thinks that if the church was like this, they would be happy just to “sing and . . . pray all the live-long day,” which is an unusual way of praising God and reminds one of pagan ceremonies (“The Little Vagabond” l. 7). In his opinion, this is how Christianity could be more successful because then no one would “wish from the Church to stray (l. 8). In the third stanza he mentions that the parson should not be strict and stiff but joyful as well, he should “preach & drink & sing” (l. 9). Thus they would be “happy as birds in the spring;” birds are obviously the symbols of freedom, this suggests weightlessness or soaring up in the sky close to heaven (l. 10). He talks about the “modest dame Lurch” as well; she had a Dame school for young children, who were usually bandy because they had rickets due to undernourishment. They were treated very strictly and could also receive punishment in the form of fasting that was otherwise economically beneficial for the school (Stanley 45). According to him, if the Church changed, even their harsh lives could be eased with the bliss it could give them.

In the fourth and last stanza the image of the benevolent father appears: “God, like a father rejoicing to see \ His children” (“The Little Vagabond” ll. 13-14). The same happens around the end of “The Little Black Boy” in which children “round the tent of God like lambs . . . joy” and they “lean in joy upon” their “father’s knee” (“The Little Vagabond” ll. 24-26). Here the little vagabond also wants to propose ideas very similar to those present in “The Little Black Boy.” Hence it can be argued that he suggests returning to something similar to the state of innocence. Due to his young age he probably exaggerates the importance of

earthly pleasures such as drinking and singing, though. Nonetheless, it is clearly vital to care for both body and soul as well; there is “a sound mind in a sound body” only. In what follows, it is mentioned that God sees “His children as pleasant and happy as he” (“The Little Vagabond” l. 14): in this case “pleasant” carries much more weight, its meaning is probably closer to “blessed” (Gardner 242). The new bliss would even stop the “quarrel with the Devil or the Barrel,” in the boy’s opinion, God would “kiss him & give him both drink and apparel” (“The Little Vagabond” ll. 15-16). To sum it up, the vagabond’s aspect is that one cannot find the real way to God through suffering or the strict doctrines of the Church but only through bliss, a natural way. He explains these ideas to his mother as well—it remains unknown what she might think—that is quite rebellious of him since it is the youth who is supposed to learn from the older. Thus, from this point of view, “The Little Vagabond” is the opposite of “The Little Black Boy,” in which the mother teaches her son about divine love, but the underlying ideas of the two are more than similar. It can also be said that the ideas learnt by the boy are further developed by the little vagabond in a more common and practical way. The two poems entitled “The Chimney Sweeper” showed similarities and differences as well; mostly, the same characters are present in them in the same environment but while the first one offers a quite idealistic—or unrealistic—solution, the second one is more down-to-earth. The importance of the parents and the angel in forming the child’s worldview and actions in *Innocence*; while in *Experience* it is the presence of oppressive institutions and the lack of divine intervention that are striking. The two poems in *Innocence* are generally more high-spirited than those in *Experience*, although it was possible to point out the efforts of the characters to overcome their hardships.

Conclusion

There are several reasons why it can be stated that Blake was an extraordinary and individualistic artist whom it is hard to categorize. He was not only a poet but a painter and engraver as well; he called himself a visionary. He published his works as illuminated books, a technique partly developed by him, full of complex pictures in the spirit of creative imagination. Texts and pictures created a special synthesis in his art, thus he could express his unusual ideas about cultural debates and social issues he was interested in.

In “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Innocence* little Tom Dacre is desperate because he is sold to become a chimney sweeper. He cannot change this but one of his peers helps him as much as he can and wants to comfort him. Then he sees a dream, a divine revelation, in which he comes in touch with an angel who reassures them that they do not have to fear any harm. This is what changes him and gives him power to hold on. Tom Dacre is not a reasoner, he unconditionally believes in the power of the divine realm he entered in his dream thus he is still in the state of innocence. In “The Chimney Sweeper” of *Experience* it is rather the gross social inequality that is emphasized. There is no angelic help; only those are present who represent the oppressive social order or the organized form of religion. Blake here draws a strong social criticism that is expressed by the young boy in the poem.

In “The Little Black Boy” of *Innocence* the mother gives a moral and religious education to her son. This is the most she can do for him; the ability of acceptance can help him face difficulties he might come across in his later life. The child wants to explain to the English boy what he heard in order to convince him of the equality of all beings regardless of skin colour. He believes that such ideas can change the English child; his belief and hope show that he lives in the world of innocence. This is the state where the boy in “The Little Vagabond” of *Experience* would like to go back, coming close to God through joyfulness.

These characters possess the capability of imagination, ideas to change their and other people’s way of thinking. Hence the poems show that the black boy, his mother, the English child, and the little vagabond, who all belong to the world of experience from the point of view that they are part of a mundane creation, are all on the way leading back to the regaining of creative imagination and higher innocence.

Notes

¹ Also see, Bowra, Cecil Maurice “The Romantic Imagination.” 87-109.

Hill, John Spencer “Imagination and the *Lyrical Ballads*.” 47-49.

² See: Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Arcana Coelestia: the heavenly arcana contained in the Holy Scripture, or Word of the Lord, unfolded*.

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- . "The Chimney Sweeper." Blake 26.
- . "The Divine Image." Blake 14.
- . "The Little Black Boy." Blake 10.
- . "The Little Vagabond." Blake 30.
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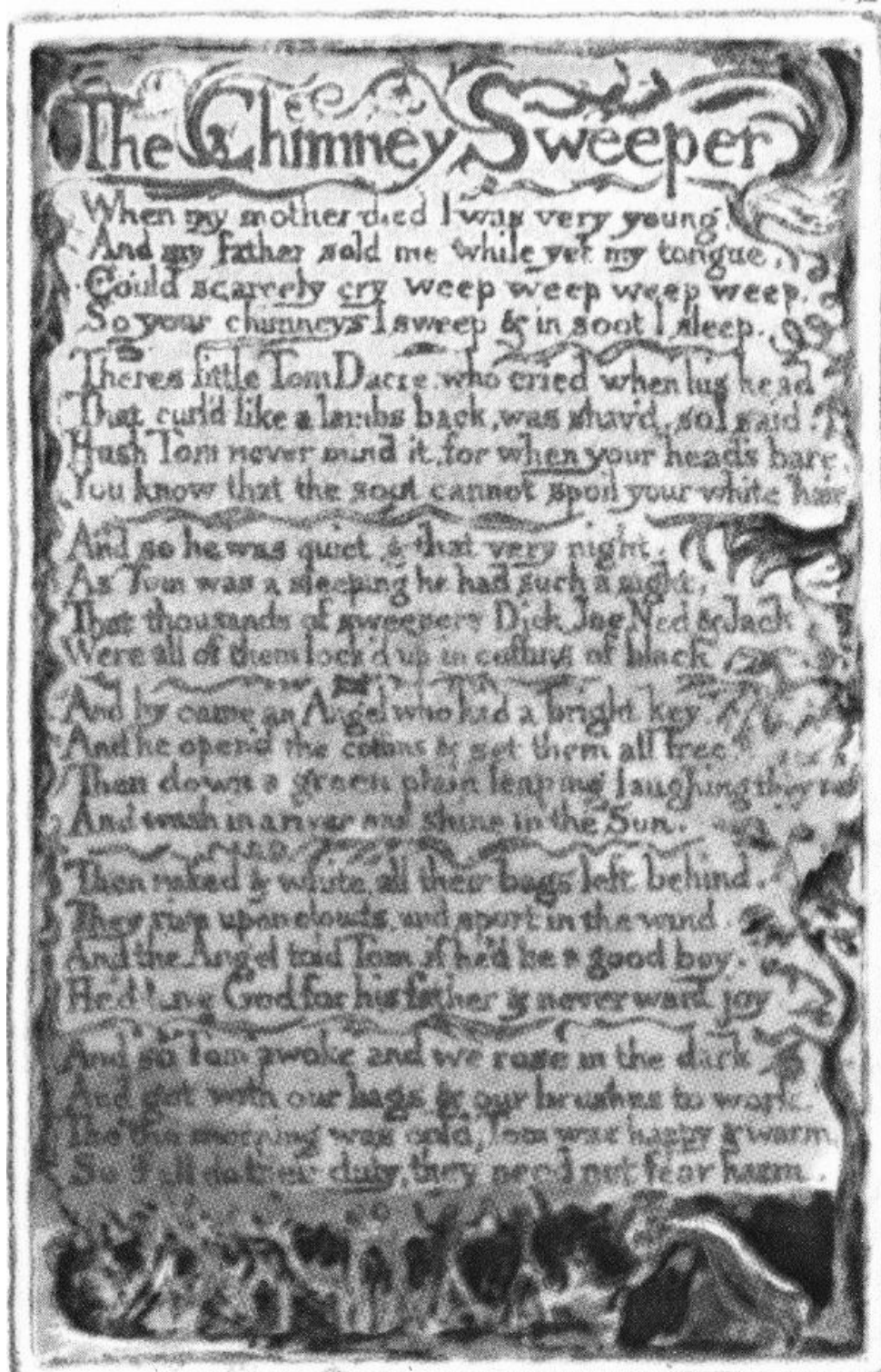


Fig. 1. Blake, William "The Chimney Sweeper." *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Plate 12.

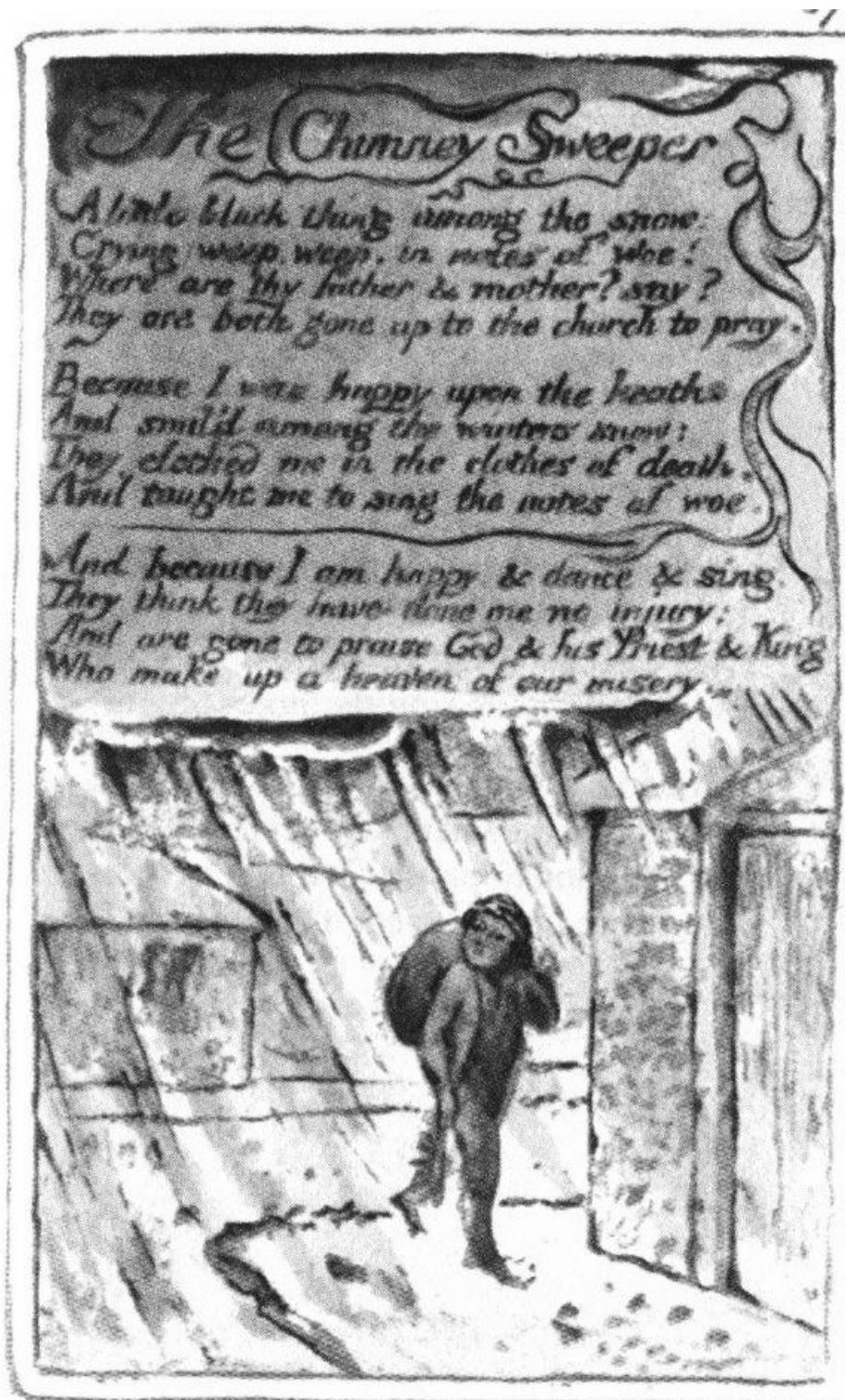


Fig. 2. ---. "The Chimney Sweeper." Plate 37.



Fig. 3. ---. "The Little Black Boy." Plate 9.



Fig. 4. ---. "The Little Black Boy." Plate 10.



Fig. 5. ---. "The Little Vagabond." Plate 45.