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WILLIAM BLAKE'S "LONDON": A RESISTANCE TO POWER AND AUTHORITY

Mevlüde ZENGİN*

When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.

John F. Kennedy

Abstract

In this study the aim is to read William Blake's "London" in a new historicist perspective. The New Historicist approach to text would enable us to historicize the poem, in other words, to interpret it as a product of historical development and thus as a text mirroring the social conditions of the miserable and the wretched living in the time in which the poem was written. To this end, in the study, the poem has been put in its social and historical contexts and the meanings of the images which Blake put in the poem have been discussed, and thus the politics prevailing in the period in which the poem was written and their reflections in the poem have been studied. Therefore contextualization is taking a great part in the study. The emphasis in the essay is on Blake's criticism of the prevalent social order. It has also been observed that Blake seeing the potential dangers in the overreliance of scientific and technological methods of thought – methods neglecting spiritual and humanistic values and enslaving rather than liberating man – opposes scientific way of thinking of the 'Age of Enlightenment', that is, Enlightenment rationality. In the poem Blake basically protests against three major institutions: the government, the monarchy and the Church. He makes his criticism of these institutions through generalization

*Yrd. Doç. Dr. Mevlüde Zengin, Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü. mzengin@cumhuriyet.edu.tr

of three main figures in the period. These are 'the chimney sweeper', 'soldier' and 'harlot'. Thus Blake depicts London, in the poem, as a city in which Londoners are exposed to the subjugation of the authority and power in, what he saw as, a corrupted social system. In the study, it has been concluded that Blake in "London" does not objectify these figures (and the groups they represent) and does not make them the 'Other' because he does not detach himself from them; on the contrary, he becomes the voice of the marginalized and the exploited who are impoverished and made the 'Other' by the administration, monarchy and the Church. The study also concludes that Blake's "London" is a poem of political and social protest and a text which resists the hegemonic forces of the time in which it was written.

Keywords: *William Blake, London, Poetry, New Historicism, Social Criticism, The Chimney Sweeper, Authority, Hegemonic Forces, Resistance to Power.*

Öz

William Blake'in "London" Adlı Şiiri: Güç Ve Otoriteye Karşı Bir Direnç

Bu çalışmada amaç William Blake'in "London" adlı şiirini Yeni Tarihselcilik bağlamında okumaktır. Metne böyle bir yaklaşım şiiri tarihselleştirmek, başka bir deyişle, şiiri tarihi gelişimin bir ürünü olarak ve böylece şiiri, içinde yazıldığı dönemde yaşayan yoksul ve çaresiz halkın sosyal durumunu yansıtan bir metin

olarak yorumlamamızı sağlayacaktır. Bundan dolayı çalışmada bağlamlama önemli bir yer teşkil etmektedir. Bu amaçla çalışmada şiir sosyal ve tarihsel bağlam içine konmakta ve Blake'in şiire koyduğu imgelerin anlamları tartışılmakta ve böylece şiirin yazıldığı tarihsel dönemde yaygın olan politikalar ile bunların şiirdeki yansımaları çalışılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada vurgu Blake'in dönemde hâkim olan sosyal düzeni sorgulaması ve eleştirmesi üzerinedir. Şiirde Blake'in ruhsal ve insani değerleri göz ardı eden ve insanı özgürleştirmekten ziyade köleleştiren bilimsel ve teknolojik düşünme yöntemlerinin olası tehlikelerini görerek, Aydınlanma Çağı'nın bilimsel düşünüş tarzına, başka bir deyişle modern akılcılığa da karşı olduğu gözlenmiştir. Şiirde Blake'in temelde üç önemli kuruma karşı olduğu gözlenmiştir. Bunlar hükümet, monarşi ve Kilisedir. Blake bu kurumlara yönelik eleştirisini dönemden seçtiği üç figürü genelleştirerek yapmaktadır. Bunlar 'baca süpürücüsü', 'asker' ve 'fahişe'dir. Blake şiirinde, Londra'yı çarpık bir sosyal sistem içinde güç ve otoritenin baskısına boyun eğmeye maruz kalan Londra halkının olduğu bir şehir olarak resmetmektedir. Çalışmada ayrıca Blake'in "London" adlı şiirinde kendini bu kişilerden (dolayısıyla onların temsil ettiği gruplardan) ayrı tutarak onları nesnelleştirmediği ve ötekileştirmediği, aksine yönetim, kraliyet ve Kilise tarafından fakirleştirilenlerin ve ötekileştirilen dışlanan ve sömürülenlerin sesi olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Böylece bu çalışma sonuç olarak, Blake'in "London" adlı şiirinin politik ve sosyal bir protesto olduğunu ve yazıldığı dönemin egemen güçlerine karşı duran bir metin olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *William Blake, London, Şiir, Yeni Tarihselcilik, Toplumsal Eleştiri, Baca Süpürücüsü, Otorite, Egemen Güçler, İktidara Karşı Direnç.*

At first, William Blake's "London" looks like an account of a personal experience, the speaker's subjective response to the ills of the society, but soon it becomes clear that the poem is a realistic representation of London and its inhabitants who are exposed to the cruelty of the Church and the tyranny of the government and monarchy. It is this very quality of the poem which attracts the reader's attention and still inspires. Another significant quality of the poem is its reflection of Blake's dislike of human authority. It seems likely that it is this dislike through which Blake created his critique of the governmental and religious forces. His reflecting the theme of despair in "London" drawing a picture of the marginalized may also be attributed to his dislike of human authority. In "London" it is equally important that the voice of the speaker has become the voice of the 'Other'. The purpose of this study is, first of all, to discuss how "London" juxtaposing romantic and realistic elements illuminates the time in which it was written and thus to show that the poem itself becomes history; and secondly, to point out how Blake, as an observer, instead of detaching himself from the marginalized and seeing the wretched and the feeble as object, becomes the voice of the 'Other' in the poem, and thus to indicate that the poem is a critical response to the authority against its control and oppression. Nevertheless, it is not a very easy task for a common reader to have these conclusions after the process of reading the poem implying different ideas and themes under its surface meaning. The study aims to read "London" from a New Historicist perspective, which is believed to facilitate to find out the poem's deep meaning and to decipher it. New Historicism is a practice for interpretation of any text, whether be literary or non-literary, which foregrounds the importance of the historical and cultural contexts in the production of the text and thus recognizes them as historical and cultural artifacts. New Historicists emphasize that texts are all produced in certain historical and social situations; in other words, they do not originate in a historical vacuum. This is described by Montrose as "*the historicity of text"* a famous assumption with its counterpart "*the textuality of history*" in New Historicism by means of which Montrose suggests "the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing – not only the texts critics study but also the texts in which we study them" (20). The New Historicists assume that in order to interpret texts, at least to have an acceptable interpretation of texts, they should be contextualized. It demonstrates the New Historicists' refusal of putting literary texts in the foreground and history in the background. In so doing what else can be attainable is an interpretation of a historical/cultural reality or historical/cultural realities. The conviction that historical reality is not accessible in itself and is always reported in the form of a text brings the idea that a historical document is

written by its author through his/her perspective, through subjectivity. This relates to the idea of narrative. It is described by Montrose as "*the textuality of history*", which implies "that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question". According to Montrose this is because "those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the "documents" upon which historians ground their own texts, called histories" (20). In this study focusing on the New Historicist premises mentioned above "London" will be put in its cultural and historical context to decipher the text as a socially constructed one. Therefore the study will not be all-inclusive in the sense that it will not attempt to apply all New Historicist practices.

William Blake (1757-1827) is an important figure in English art and culture with his poems, paintings, dramatic works and carvings. Blake was an artist who had actually three professional careers: "first as a competent engraver […] second as an original and powerful designer, an inventor of graphic ideas […], and third as an untutored author" (Bentley 1). Born in London, Blake was the third of the seven children in the family. Till he was ten, he went to school and then he was educated at home by his mother. He read the Bible and English poets and had knowledge of French, Italian, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Blake is known to have grown up "on a knife-edge of London between poverty and prosperity, identifying with his poorer neighbors while struggling to make his way in the upper-class world of patrons and Academicians" (Ward 21). When he was twenty-one, he entered the Royal Academy but he soon became restless with its traditional approach. In 1789 he published *Songs of Innocence* describing childhood state of innocence. After publishing *The Book of Thel* and *Tiriel*, in 1794 he added *Songs of Experience* to an edition of *Songs of Innocence*. *Songs of Experience* describes the inevitable corruption of the childhood innocence by a harsh and unjust world. Then Blake renamed them *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (Ousby 40). This work "abounds in images of children in a world in which people are exploited" (Carter and McRae 225). Blake was not a poet who was favored in his own lifetime; it was left to later generations to recognize his importance. Harold Bloom demonstrates this fact in a five-paged biography of Blake, which was written in 2003: "It was […] a century before Blake would be appreciated and admired as an artist and poet. Now, he is considered the first, and among the greatest, of the English Romantics" (16). Bentley also writes that "Blake was scarcely known as an author during his lifetime, and much of what is today thought of as his greatest and most

characteristic work was then dismissed as incomprehensible" (6). This may be due to the fact that recent theories pave the way for different readings and acceptable interpretations of, various approaches and perspectives to texts. New Historicism which is a recent theory, and whereby we attempt to read Blake's poem in this study, provides the reader and critic with various ways of interpretation of texts. Therefore, this essay has been thought to be an interesting study in that it takes the poem as a text dealing with social and political issues rather than taking it as a piece of romantic poem, and it highlights Blake's realism, and social political criticism. As Mee writes, Blake is a poet who is "routinely described as a visionary or mystic […] more concerned with spiritual than political matters" (133). Blake, as a poet, "focuses on human experience" and searches for "understanding and evaluating the complexity of life: he is the questioning individual, the seer" (Thorne 186). It should also be noted that he is a seer who makes the reader see. From "London" it can be inferred that Blake is not a poet accepting the prevailing attitudes, ideas, concepts and so on. Though he lived and wrote in the Augustan Age, he was always opposed to the Augustan values. Thorne puts the case as such: "As a poet and as a man Blake was isolated in the 'Age of Reason'. His attempts to escape from the conventions of eighteenth-century verse, from the repressive Puritan interpretation of Christianity and the material approach to life marked him out as a maverick in a time of conformity" (186). Morris Eaves also appreciates Blake for "achieving balance between restraint and revelation" (1). The idea which comes to mind is that Blake, as a poet bridges the gap between the rationalism of the 18th century and imagination and fancy of Romanticism. For Bloom, Blake is a poet who does not "set intellect and passion against one another" (3), which implies that Blake juxtaposed these two values which seemed to many other poets and authors separate. Thorne writes that "his poetry, prose and engravings represent both eighteenth century intellect and the expression of emotion that came to be associated with the Romantic movement […] he identifies *the Passions* as an integral part of *the Intellect* " (187). To conclude it can be said that Blake cannot be resembled to the other Romantic poets who highlight feelings and emotions in their works and therefore Blake is such a poet who juxtaposes the two qualities of man: Passion and intellect.

"London" is one of Blake's poems included in *the Songs of Experience* and it implicitly deals with the social ills prevailing in London society in 1790s. McGann, considering Blake's *Songs* "the best examples of 'primary' Romantic works", claims that it possesses "an unusual confidence in the mutually constructive powers of imagination and criticism when both operate dialectically". For him, this work of Blake's along with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* institutes "a broad critique of inherited

religion, philosophy, artistic production, and society" (118). Thus, it can be said that "London" includes social and political criticism, which seems to have been stemmed from both Blake's free imagination and critical eye. Besides, Blake's lifetime saw the advent of the commercial society. Due to this fact, he can be regarded as one of the intellectuals who approached industrialism, technology and scientific development with anxiety, because of their inevitable outcome: materialism. Blake's poetry is always referred to as 'prophetic' in the sense that it has signs warning of dangers, horrors and injustices. "London" is no exception; it alerts the reader to the prevailing social ills which, then for Blake, would possibly accumulate in the future. Blake is a poet who was "conscious of the effects on the individual of a rapidly developing industrial and commercial world. He saw the potential dangers of a mass society in which individuals were increasingly controlled by systems of organization" (Carter and McRae 226). In this sense, Blake can be considered to be an intellectual having both suspicions of the workings of the social system and auguries about the running of the world in the future, at least the future condition of English society. "London" indicates the exploitation of the common people by the privileged commerce classes, the monarchy and the Church resulting with people's abject poverty and miseries. Owing to the critical aspect of the poem and its analytic approach to social facts, it can be considered to be a poem which, at the same time, both reflects the history and resists its facts.

The text of the poem, "London" was integrated into an illustration, in which there is, at the top of the page, an old cripple and a child leading him through the street, and on the right hand, a figure warming himself at a fire.[1] As the design does not relate directly to the poem and the imagery in the illustration deserves particular attention, the illustration would not be tackled here. "London" was also composed as a song for tenor by Blake.[2] The poem "London" reads as follows:

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

[1] The illuminated page of "London", which was reproduced for many times by Blake himself, can be seen at http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=songsie.c.illbk.49&java=no.

[2] 2 For Blake's song that has the same name with his poem "London" see *Ten Blake Songs,* ed. R. Vaughan Williams, (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.7.

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 blackning Church appals,
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.
(Blake 42-43)

"London" consists of four stanzas, each of which consists of four lines. In the first stanza, the speaker says that while he is wandering through the chartered streets where the Thames River flows, he sees expression of sufferings and sadness on the faces of weak and woeful people. From the very first stanza of the poem, it is understood that the poem is a serious and pessimistic one. The second stanza, in which one finds more misery and despair, reveals the speaker's ideas about rules. He views them as chains which imprison the poor. In each cry of man and of infant, he hears the chains through which people have been deprived of liberty. Bloom comments that "the challenges of life in London weigh heavy on the minds of citizens" and that Blake believes "Londoners are shackled to an unpleasant life and that the worst of it is that the Londoners' imprisonment is of their own conception" (42). In the third stanza the speaker portrays a chimney-sweeper and tells the reader that he has also a miserable life and therefore his cry appealing to the speaker's heart becomes the object of pity. Because the soldier has misery in himself, he is also unhappy and is a sufferer like the chimney-sweeper. It is apparent that the causes of the sufferings of the chimney-sweeper and the soldier are the Church and the Palace respectively. According to the speaker Londoners could not find any "comfort in prayer and no solace in the monarchy" (Bloom (b) 43). In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker points out one of the social ills: prostitution. During midnight, darkness cannot disguise despair; the speaker hears the cry of a young whore who curses marriage. Her curse may be the result of her belief that she can never marry. The second idea which is equally important in the last stanza is that the prostitute does not want children to be born either because "the life into which they have been born is not an easy one. It is not comfortable and promises no joy" (Bloom (b) 43). The reasons for why she thinks about marriage in this way would be made

clear by presenting the issue extensively, in a later part of the study. To interpret the last lines in a new historicist perspective, it is necessary to put the poem in its historical context; in other words, to indicate the wretched conditions of the prostitutes in the eighteenth-century London. It is only in this way that the meaning of her curse on marriage and new-born baby's birth can be clarified. Therefore, it can be argued that, to some extent, the meaning of the poem depends on the context.

What attracts the attention of the reader in "London" is its juxtaposition of the romantic elements with the realistic elements. Being a lyric, the poem, appeals to the emotions; and it also draws a realistic picture of London in Blake's own lifetime which saw the Industrial Revolution and the times after the French Revolution. On the one hand, as a Romantic, Blake, in a subjective way, expressing the misery of the depressed, the oppressed and the wretched, shows his personal reaction to their dire situation; but on the other hand, presenting a realistic picture of London of the 1790s through powerful images he criticizes the cruelty of the Church of England and the tyranny of the government. The poem "provides an extremely grim picture of life in London, a worst-case scenario" (Bloom (b) 42). Meanwhile, it should be noted that the information about Blake's own worldview, ideas and insights that one gains as reader enables him/her to make a connection between Blake and the speaker in "London". Quinney points out that "London" is a poem "whose speaker readers (and scholars) are most likely to conflate with Blake", and that "the speaker of "London" is an incisive social critic" (37). The speaker's approach to the social and political values of the time is not different from that of Blake; in other words, he is not a person having a personality other than that of Blake. The speaker in the poem can be identified with Blake himself. Therefore when we say 'the speaker', we mean Blake or vice versa. Blake's portrayal of London and its inhabitants is so vivid that the readers have a clear mental picture of them. The poem has lyric qualities; in addition to this, Blake develops a narrative voice in a narrative poem. Actually "London" does not provide a story or stories given explicitly and therefore it requires that the reader construct the stories of the major figures in the poem which are untold. While expressing his emotions and feelings towards the poverty-stricken Londoners pressurized by both the Church and the government, Blake employs his narrative voice in the poem. Therefore it can be said that the Londoners whom the speaker sees and hears while wandering in the streets of London, namely, the infant, the chimney-sweeper, the soldier and the harlot, all of whose cries are heard by the speaker, have their own stories to tell. The reader has to put the poem in its historical context to know what their untold stories are.

The time in the poem is the last years of 1780s and the early years of 1790s, and the place is London. It would be useful for one to understand the time in which the poem was constructed and the historical facts whereby the poem was produced in order to analyze "London" from a new historicist perspective. Thus it can be indicated how the speaker's voice has become the voice of the oppressed, the exploited and the poor. So it is necessary to have a look at the reflection of London in the mentioned times in other discourses. A picture of London depicting the situation in which Blake wrote "London" can be found in Bloom's succinct expression:

> In Blake's opinion, The Industrial Revolution had changed the city for worse. The manufacturing work being done in the factories created filth and pollution. London was dirty. Thick, black smoke from factories left behind a nasty residue where it landed. The River Thames was polluted with the byproducts of industry. The new type of work changed the city socially, economically, and topographically. Although the new industrial economy created many jobs, the wages of these jobs were low. Long hours of hard labor did not guarantee a living wage. The poor worked themselves to death in unsafe, unsanitary, and unhealthful conditions (41).

This state of London also became, for the intellectuals, one of the important issues to be dealt with before 1780s. For example Ben Sedgly was preoccupied with it in *Observations on Mr. Fielding's Enquiry*[33] in 1751. London was depicted by Sedgly as "a place of bewildering diversity, changing and growing rapidly, in which a new kind of anonymity and alienation was becoming a remarked-upon fact of life" (Glen 147). Sedgly writes:

> No man can take survey of this opulent city, without meeting in this way, many melancholy instances resulting from this consumption of spirituous liquors: poverty, diseases, misery and wickedness, are the daily observations to be made in every part of this great

[3] *Observations on Mr. Fielding's Enquiry* was published in *The London Magazine* in January 1751. The essay in its original form and in the English used in those days can also be accessed from
http://books.google.com.tr/books?id=oF9FAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA166&lpg=PA166&dq=ben+sedgley+
observations+on+mr+fielding's+enquiry&source#v=onepage&q=ben%20sedgley%20%20observations%20on%20mr%20fielding's%20enquiry&f=false

> metropolis: whoever passes along the streets, may find numbers of abandoned wretches stretched upon the cold pavement, motionless and insensible, removed only by the charity of passengers from the danger of being crushed by carriages, trampled by horses, or strangled with filth in the common sewers (quoted in Glen 147).

Peter Ackroyd also draws a picture of the poverty in London beginning from the Middle Ages and ending in 1920s, which implies the idea that poverty was a social problem in the medieval English society and still existed in the following centuries. Ackroyd writes of poverty in England:

> The poor have always been part of the texture of the city. They are like the stones or the bricks, because London has risen from them; their mute suffering has no limits. In the medieval city the old, the crippled, the deformed and the mad were the first poor; those who could not work, and thus had no real or secure place in the social fabric, became the outcast. By the sixteenth centurythere were poor sections of the city […] it could be said that by some instinctive process the poor clustered together, or it might be concluded that parts of the city harboured them. They were hawkers or pedlars or criers or chimney-sweeps […] In the eighteenth-century accounts we read of squalid courts and miserable houses, of 'dirty neglected children' and 'slipshod women', of 'dirty, naked, unfurnished' rooms and of men who stayed within them because their 'clothes had become too ragged to submit to daylight scrutiny'. Those who lacked even this primitive accommodation slept in empty or abandoned houses; they sheltered in bulks or in doorways (464).

Ackroyd goes on to comment on the misery in London and gives some figures to pinpoint that "poverty never leaves London" and "it merely changes its form and appearance" (468). He writes that "a survey conducted in the late 1920s […] calculated that 8.7 per cent of Londoners were still living in poverty" and that "another survey in 1934 reported that 10 per cent of London families lived beneath the poverty line" (Ackroyd 468). All these prove that Blake was right in his auguries about the future and he deserves to be called the "prophet against empire" as called by David Erdman in his book entitled *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*.

As it has been seen, "London" makes a parallelism with the historical texts in respect of the depiction of the poor and the revelation of the misery in the 18th century. The poem can present to its readers the historical facts as a historical document does, which enables us to see the poem as a text situating history in it and reflecting historical events or phenomena through the perspective of its poet. One of the important premises in New Historicism is its making no distinction between literary and historical texts. In other words, in New Historicism all texts ranging from literary texts to cultural or historical documents are believed to be historical and cultural artifacts shaped by the history and culture in which they are produced. Likewise, the author himself is shaped by the history and culture in which he lives. In other words, texts are not autonomous. So both a historical document and a literary text are produced through the subjectivity of the author. In this sense, in Blake's poem, the case is not different from that of a historical writing. Blake, by means of his subjectivity, reflects the historical and cultural phenomena in which the poem is produced in the same way as a historian does when he writes a historical document. A historian, for the new historicists can never put his subjectivity aside while producing his text; for this reason, there is no objective text reflecting the real truths in history. History is always known through texts, so it is nothing more than a narration. As a conclusion, it can be said that "London" is a text competing with historical texts in describing the squalor of London life.

In the poem, at first, the speaker seems to be describing and interpreting what he sees as he goes along: "I wander through each charter'd street"; but it soon becomes clear that "he is describing many wanderings, putting together impressions from many walks, re-creating a typical walk – which shows him "every" person in the streets" (Beaty and Hunter 199). This allows the speaker to generalize about what he sees and hears in London streets. Man, infant, chimney-sweeper, soldier and harlot are all the inhabitants of London whose cries have been heard by the speaker for many times. Therefore, they are not a particular man, a particular infant, a particular chimney-sweeper, a particular soldier and a particular harlot; rather they are representatives of the classes or groups they belong to. Blake's use of the capital initials in the poem while writing both these words and some others like "Church" and "Palace" also demonstrates that these words were employed in the poem not to talk about the particular persons or places and give simple meanings but to suggest some deeper meanings. For example, "the capitalization of "Man" in the second stanza suggests that the whole of the urbanized society has gone to the state of moral decay and misery" (Zahn 1613). The capital letter in the expression "every Infant's

cry" reveals the idea that there is something beyond just children that the speaker meets. Here Blake associates child with innocence – this is a common association especially in the Romantics – and says that innocence is corrupted by fear. According to the speaker, the child should idealistically be *given* security and be *provided with* a safe haven. Another capitalization used in the "Chimney-sweeper's cry" gives the idea that the phrase does not only have its literal meaning; rather it represents child labour, which was widely-seen in the period in which the poem was written. The capital initial in "Church" implies the Church of England. In the same way, "Soldier" symbolizes the army in England in those times; "Harlot" signifies prostitution, which is known to be a great problem in England in the 18th and 19th centuries due to the widespread unemployment. To get what "Palace" suggests, we should go beyond the simple meaning it signifies – a large grand house where a ruling king or (and) queen officially live(s) –; in this way it can be understood that it suggests royalty and monarchy; and lastly "Marriage" is more than its simple explanation of the union of a man and woman by law: it is an idea or a representation of a social institution. As can be seen, capitalization is extensively employed in the poem and its function is to suggest the great picture rather than to give the literal meanings of the words. In doing so, Blake shows the ills of the society and thus he questions the functions of the institutions and he criticizes them for failing to perform their duties. In other words, through suggestions, he makes his criticism against the social system. As Porter argues Blake "anatomized the capital's squalor and crime, and the townsman's inhumanity to man" (160). According to the poem, "people are victimized, 'marked' by their confrontations with urbanness [sic] and the power of institutions" (Beaty and Hunter 199). In this respect, it can be argued that the poet is highly critical of the social evils prevalent in the London of his times. It can also be argued that it is Blake's romantic side that makes him have a critical eye on the social institutions and thus react against them. In other words, Blake's romanticism paves the way for his realism; his poem is his inner reaction towards the outer facts. His approach to the institutions of the period is a utilitarian one as well. However, this may be called his romantic humanism, through which he sees the evils and wickedness and, which enables him to illustrate the social ills and to challenge the callousness of hegemonic powers.

The exploration of those to whom Blake is referring may be another useful investigation in this study. Blake is complaining that all the streets in London and even the Thames are chartered. The question to be asked here is by whom they were chartered. The historical fact which is encountered in the

response to this question is that in the 18th-century England there were tradesmen and businessmen who chartered even the public places in London. This group of successful businessmen was known as the Nonconformists, who held England's economy in their hands because they were the most successful class in trade and industry and who, uniting with such sects as Dissenters and the Evangelicals, would become "a formidable force" in the 19th century (Abrams 929). When we look at the social life of the Nonconformists in the 18th century, we see that they were hardworking and

> they could be hard on their families, as Puritan fathers had been a century earlier. But they were also ambitious for their sons, sending them away to boarding school at a young age. Removed from family affection, this kind of education increased individualism. Starved of emotional life, many of these boys grew up to put all their energy into power, either helping to build the empire, or helping to build trade and industry (McDowall 120).

Of course, such individualism could not exist for the poor as Blake suggests in his poem. Blake portrays a severe social discrimination as well. Life was not a happy and enjoyable thing for the laboring classes in the 18th century. They suffered from poverty. To understand the extent of the misery of the poorer classes and their life condition, we may quote McDowall:

> Where women and children could find work making cloth, a worker family might double its income, and do quite well. But a poor family in which only the father could find work lived on the edge of starvation […] An increasing number of families had no choice but to go to the parish workhouse. A poor woman expecting a baby was often sent out of the parish, so that feeding the mother and the child became the responsibility of another parish workhouse (120-121).

Blake develops a political view of London through his reference to the systems as the result of 'mind-forg'd manacles'. "Even the River Thames has been 'charter'd'(given a royal charter to be used for commercial purposes)" (Carter and McRae 226). The image "Charter'd" has many meanings. According to *The World Book Dictionary*, a charter is "a written grant by a government to a colony, a group of citizens, a university, or a business or a corporation, bestowing the right of organization, with other privileges." It also means "to hire […] especially for private use" (Barnhart and Barnhart 344). It is obvious that a charter limits the rights of others and the word 'chartered' shows that the city with its streets is in the hands of the

merchants, and even the river Thames is being controlled for the profits of the privileged classes. Throughout history, many historians or theorists preoccupied with the charters and corporations, and the monopoly they had. Thomas Paine, who is a strong supporter of the French Revolution, is among them. He is a political activist and theorist, author and revolutionist who approached these organizations in business negatively. "Chartered" became a word which was challenged by Paine in *The Rights of Man* (1791). Paine argues that "city charters, by annulling the rights of the majority, cheat the inhabitants and destroy the town's prosperity" (Erdman 44). To quote Paine:

> It is a perversion of terms to say, that a charter gives rights. It operates by a contrary effect - that of taking rights away. Rights are inherently in all the inhabitants; but charters, by annulling those rights, in the majority, leave the right, by exclusion, in the hands of a few. If charters were constructed so as to express in direct terms, "that every inhabitant, who is not a member of a corporation, shall not exercise the right of voting," such charters would, in the face, be charters of no rights, but of exclusion. […] all charters have no other than an indirect negative operation. They do not give rights to A, but they make a difference in favour of A by taking away the right of B, and consequently are instruments of injustice (95).

In order to convey the meaning of Blake's phrase, the "charter'd Thames" the following quotation is particularly apt.

> London's government grew more quirky. The City was ruled by an entrenched Corporation, but it was fast shrinking relative to the metropolis at large, which, though housing the vast majority of Londoners, was presided over by a crazy-paving of jurisdictions whose rationale lay in historical accident rather than efficiency. In some respects the City's writ ranged far beyond its wards and precincts: it held a legal monopoly of markets; it levied coal duties in a radius of twelve miles; it administered and taxed the Port of London, and it formed the governing authority for the Thames from Staines Bridge to the Medway (Porter 150).

For E.P. Thompson "charter'd" is associated with both commerce and cheating. In his essay "The Ways in Which Words Change London", Thompson sees the Chartered Companies as "bastions of privilege within the government of the city" and shows The East India Company, "whose ships

were so prominent in the commerce of the Thames", as an example to companies with the "monopolistic privileges" (49). For Thompson, while a charter is giving the privileges to a group or class, it limits another group or class; therefore the poor are in bondage. He comments especially on this aspect of being 'chartered':

> A charter of liberty is, simultaneously, a denial of these liberties to others. A charter is something given or ceded; it is bestowed upon some groups by some authority; it is not claimed as of right. And the liberties (or privileges) granted to this guild, company, corporation or even nation *exclude* others from the enjoyment of these liberties. A charter is, in its nature, exclusive (Thompson 50).

It is this aspect of the monopolized commerce that Blake is against in "London". Blake, in a sense, shares the same idea with Paine and Thompson: A charter, while granting privileges to a commercial group, takes the rights of the common people and thus cheats, limits and exploits them. In the last line of the first stanza of the poem, "marks of weakness" and "marks of woe", which the speaker sees in every man's face as a usual expression, are both the mirror-images and outcomes of their freedom's being taken away from them. The poem with its argument over the monopolistic politics of the government is a social and political protest.

Another image in "London", "mind-forg'd manacles" is equally important. Therefore its meaning should be explored to historicize the poem and to find out what Blake opposes by means of this metaphor. Blake imagines the mind as a blacksmith's forge where manacles, shackles and handcuffs are made. These are all things which prevent someone from escaping, from doing what s/he wants; in this respect they are an allusion to constriction. The "mind-forg'd manacles" symbolize the attitudes taking away one's freedom of thought and action. For Blake what is equally important is that the chains and the bondage, which mean the lack of freedom, stem from man's mind and reason. Metaphorically, man is chained up by wisdom and law. Blake sees the inhabitants of London as those who are physically trapped by the chartered streets and river in the first stanza of the poem and now in the second as those who are "mentally bound by the 'mind-forg'd manacles' of a corrupt morality hammered into place by the despotic institutions of industry, church and government" (Sayers and Monin 4). The central figures in the poem, the chimney sweeper, the soldier and the harlot all represent those who have lack of freedom because of the "manacles" being "mind-forg'd". They are passive victims of material

powers; they are subjected to institutional domination and control, and therefore, they have "marks of weakness" and "marks of woe" in their faces. The 18th century was believed to be an age of stability, security and of balance as Burgess pointed out. He gives a lucid account of the age:

> The eighteenth century is sometimes called England's Augustan Age. The reference is to that period of Roman history when the Emperor Augustus ruled, and when the Roman Empire enjoyed great power, prosperity, and stability. Eighteenth-century England had all these things too: trade flourished, an empire was growing, two formidable rivals – Holland and France – had been soundly trounced, there was no more trouble between King and Parliament […] It was not an age of conflict, but of balance. The rule of reason seemed possible, progress was no empty myth, and with some satisfaction men looked back to that sunlit Roman age where order and taste ruled […] Now, in the eighteenth century, reason and emotion no longer work together (141-42).

Wolfson sees the metaphor "mind-forg'd manacles" as "a dark poetic invention" through which Blake "shakes our senses":

> Manacle (in an age of legal slave-trade is a strongly visual image of a constraining form, even with the psychological tenor of "mind-forg'd." The extravagant metaphor is precisely Blake's point: the manacles are invisible in the social and institutional forces of their forging; it is their consequences, a city where "every Man" (the syllable caught in "manacles") cries in pain before sighing into death, that is the devastating recognition. We have to see into what we hear and hear an indictment in the symbolic translation of what we see: the last sigh of a living body becomes blood on the walls of a death-demanding institution (81).

It is apparent that Blake's poem is a reaction against the order and discipline of the 'Age of Reason' because it is this very feature of the age which made the people poor and miserable, for Blake. It should also be noted that rationality and scientific reasoning brought the Industrial Revolution, by which people were enslaved to living in an industrial and materialist world. If the authorities had not relied on just their reason and intellect, for Blake, they could have reached the true reality, seen the real condition of the poor. Actually, Blake blames the rationalists for their negligence of man's spiritual side. Blake, seeing the potential dangers of

overreliance of scientific and technological methods of thought – methods enslaving rather than liberating humans, opposes Enlightenment rationality. Thus Blake, through "London", makes a powerful response against the rationality of the 18th century in which he sees a mental enslavement along with people's physical enslavement as people had to work just like machines in such an industrial society, which does not consider man's spiritual needs. Thus, for him, 18th-century enlightenment left man not in light.

In the third stanza of "London" the speaking persona reveals the miserable life led by the chimney sweeper. Definitely, the small boy's cry appeals to the poet's heart. This could be due to the fact that he cleans the chimneys which are full of soot, and chimney-sweeping is a dangerous job. The chimney sweeper should be taken here as a representative of all children who are exposed to dangerous hard work at an early age. So what Blake is doing here is to pinpoint a burning issue – the child's labour and exploitation of children. Here Blake also calls the Church blackening. It can also be thought that the Church is blackened because normally the Church is expected to be helpful to the poor; but on the contrary, it appears as a friend of the rich and suppressor of the poor, which is a hypocritical act. As a result, the chimney sweeper suffers and cries. The chimney sweeper is a figure "very dear to Blake and immediately familiar to even the most casual reader of any of his works" (Makdisi 105). Blake is known to have even written two poems called "the Chimney Sweeper"; one is in the *Songs of Innocence* and the other in the *Songs of Experience* (Yeats 51-52, 71). The subject matter of either of these poems is the chimney sweeper's abject misery and poverty voiced by a chimney sweeper and the theme is exploitation of children. A chimney sweeper is a worker who clears ash and soot from chimneys. It is reported that these children were either stolen from their families or were sold by their poor families and were subjected to both hard toil and bad treatment by their masters (Mayhew, 347). Even boys as young as four were compelled to climbing up the chimneys as narrow as nine inches and with hot flues to sweep the soot in them. This was a work which the chimney sweepers' masters could not do because of their size. Chimneys may be straight or contain many changes of direction. Therefore little children were obliged to "go up the chimneys at an age when their bones are in a soft and growing state" (Mayhew, 350). During operation a layer of creosote builds up on the inside of the chimney and thus it restricts the flow. For this reason, there were many possible dangers of sweeping the chimney. For example, the creosote can catch fire, setting the chimney and the building alight. Chimney sweepers were subjected to not only wounds, burns, bruises, coughs, and accidents but also inflammations of the chest,

asthma, cancer, sores, sore eyes and eyelids, deformity (especially of the spine, legs and arms) and stunted growth. Chimney sweepers were sometimes subjected to death during the operation as reported by Mayhew (347-355). Work was dangerous and the boys were in danger of getting jammed in the flue, suffocation or burning. As the soot was a carcinogen, and the chimney sweepers, being rarely washed, slept under the soot sacks, they were prone to the chimney-sweeps cancer known as 'soot wart'. Definitely, chimney sweepers were "on the edge of beggary" and were living as "social outcasts, made separate by the very filth of their profession" (Hitchcock, 2004: 196). From 1775 onwards there was increasing concern for the welfare of the boys. The Chimney Sweepers Act passed in the Parliament to stop child labour in general and better the working conditions of chimney sweepers. One instance to this betterment is that apprentices were not allowed to climb flues to extinguished fires (Strange, 65). Another improvement on the issue was realized with the passage of Chimney Sweepers Act in the Parliament in 1875. They restricted such a labour of children and stopped this usage (Mayhew, 370).

As Bott and Const wrote in *Decisions of the Court of King's Bench, Upon the Laws Relating to the Poor* in 1793, the chimney sweeper, in the late 1780s and early 1790s, were also called the "climbing boys" and they were not supposed to "call the streets" unless they were not supervised by one of their master's journeymen, and "only from five in the morning until midday, six days a week" (quoted in Makdisi 105). The chimney sweepers were also subjected to many diseases and deformations in those times. The dangers to the health of the chimney sweepers are given by Makdisi as such:

> In addition to the perpetual filth and darkness in which they worked and lived, their continual inhalation of smoke and soot, their being forced – sometimes by scorching – up narrow and twisted chimneys, and their inability to secure adequate rest and cleanliness, all of which subjected them to terrible scars, burns, scratches, and diseases (including ulcerous growths and "a peculiar disease" of the scrotum), there was also a great deal of worrying about the long-term effect of their labor on their very bodies. For, typically beginning work at around the age of five, by the age of twelve or thirteen a chimney sweeper, now grown too large for this cramped work, would inevitably be a broken or stunted cripple, finished for life (105).

The following extract from David Porter's *Considerations on the Present State of Chimney Sweepers* depicts the life of the children working

under very hard conditions in the 18th-century England. Porter's expressions make it clear that it was not an unfamiliar picture then:

> If we would see this poor apprentice as he really is, let us view him in a wintry morning exposed to the surly blast or a falling snow, trudging the streets half naked, his sore bleeding, his limbs contracted with cold, his inhuman master driving him beyond his strength, whilst the piteous tears of hunger and misery trickle down his cheek, which is, indeed, the only means he has to vent his grief, follow him home, and view him in his gloomy cell, and there will be found misery unmasked: we shall see this poor boy in a cellar, used as a foot warehouse on one side, and his lodging room on the other; I would have said his bed-room, but he has seldom any other bed than his sack, or any other covering than his foot cloth: in this comfortless state he shiveringly sleeps, or rather passes over the chilly hours of night. It would be some consolation to the boy if in six days of misery he could anticipate the seventh as a respite, not only from his sooty labours, but his gloomy cell, to be washed from his filth so as to be admitted into society and the public worship of his God; but alas! his whole wardrobe is a ragged shirt and tattered breeches, both of the sable hue. From those disadvantages he is banished from society, and can associate only with the companions of his own misery (30-31).

The reason for the plight of laboring children is given in *An Illustrated History of Britain*. It is obvious that they were exploited by the industrial society:

> The use of child labour in the workhouse and in the new factories increased towards the end of the century. This was hardly surprising. A rapidly growing population made a world of children. Children of the poor had always worked as soon as they could walk. Workhouse children were expected to learn a simple task from the age of three, and almost all would be working by the age of six or seven. They were particularly useful to factory owners because they were easy to discipline, unlike adults, and they were cheap (McDowall 120).

Blake, through the reflection of the 'chimney sweeper' in his poem, shows how juvenile labour is exploited. It also implies the fatal lot of the 'chimney sweeper'. Therefore, the poem can be regarded as a protest against

the harm that society does its children by exploiting them for such a labour. It can be said that the poem's sad, despairing and angry tone is still kept in the third stanza of the poem and its revolt against authority is given in this tone. Blake conveys the idea that there is no social legislation to better the miserable situation of the 'chimney sweeper". Blake also condemns the Church of England for its indifference to those children who have to work in danger at a very early age. Blake suggests that the Church itself is blackened with smoke from the chimneys. Metaphorically, the Church is blackened with the shame for its indifference to the miserable situation of the "chimney sweeper" and for its failure to help him. For Blake, the Church should also be appalled by the cry of the 'chimney sweeper'. The poem is also a revolt against the Church, which is expected idealistically and morally to give help to the poor and the miserable but does not fulfill its duty.

A glimpse of the Church of England in the 18th-century England will provide the reader with the fact that the Church is known to have been slow to adapt itself to the novelties seen in the structure of the society; in other words, the Church could not adopt the rapid changes in the modern world; it could not meet the spiritual needs of the ordinary people of the new industrial towns. McDowall puts the case as such: "The Church of England did not recognize the problems of these towns and many priests belonged to the gentry and shared the opinions of the government and ruling class […] The Church of England itself showed little interest in the social and spiritual needs of the growing population" (123-124).

It is surprising for the reader that Blake creating images such as the 'chimney sweeper' tells the reader so many things. The "hapless soldier" is another image alluding to so many things about the history of England in the 18th century. Blake's political revolt becomes clear in the last two lines of the second stanza: "And the hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls." In these lines, Blake says that the 'soldier' sighs, and he is unhappy like man and the 'chimney sweeper' seen in London streets, and thus Blake renders his disaffection with the politics and policies of the time. Blake once again makes the reader hear the "plaintive voice of the men who were forced to join the army out of economic necessity." In those times, joining the army was the only way for the poor to support their families. Therefore, the poor often "became the cannon fodder in the war George III had declared against France in February 1793" (quoted in Rix 28). Rix explains that the radical satirist Charles Pigott commented in his satirical work, *A Political Dictionary: Explaining the True Meaning of Words* (1795) "that 'starvation' was the only option for the poor unless they chose the workhouse, or volunteered as soldiers. So, while George III would be

'merry' that his army was manned, the poor would 'die like dogs in ditches" (29). The poem, in the last line of the third stanza, points out that blood is running down the palace walls. This hyperbole (exaggeration) may be a reference to the French Revolution, during which blood is said to have run down in the streets of Paris. It may also be taken as a warning telling that the soldier's unhappiness may cause a similar bloodshed. What leads us to such a connection is the poem's being written down just three years after the French Revolution. Stewart Crehan argues that the image of the "hapless Soldier's sigh" "becomes visible as blood running down the 'Palace walls' and that it "exposes and indicts the 'hapless' soldier's *true* enemy which is […] king, parliament and archbishop who, from the safety of their respective palaces, urge poor laboring man to die for their country, fighting the foreigner". He also takes the image as something that "contains a prophetic warning: the blood could one day be the oppressor's" (55).

There is something more to be said about Blake's "hapless Soldier". For Erdman, "the soldier's utterance that puts blood on palace walls is parallel to the harlot's curse that blasts and blights". Erdman also makes a parallelism between the soldier's blood running down the palace walls – which is a kind of curse – and the curses which were often "chalked or painted on the royal walls" in 1792. Giving some exemplary cognate passages, Erdman gives us the idea that Blake might have known the factual event which happened in October 1792. Blake's expressions "hapless soldier", "sigh" and "palace walls" are all reminiscent of this event. Erdman writes:

> In October 1792 Lady Malmesbury's Louisa saw 'written upon the Privy Garden-wall, "No coach-tax; d—Pitt! d—n the Duke of Richmond! *no King*" […] passages in which Blake mentions blood on palace walls indicate that the blood is an apocalyptic omen of mutiny and civil war involving regicide. In *The French Revolution* people and soldiers fraternize, and when their 'murmur' (sigh) reaches the palace, blood runs down the ancient pillars (45-46).

Finally, we can say that Blake in the last two lines of the third stanza of the poem sees soldier as another victim of the politics of the monarchy and accuses the monarchy of making his subjects miserable. Besides, it is apparent that Blake created such an image as the "hapless Soldier" taking into account the historical facts.

In the last stanza of "London", Blake throws light on an extremely significant social evil: prostitution. The speaker says that during midnight the curses and cries of young prostitutes are heard in the streets of London. It

is known that in those times many young girls in London had neither money nor any source of livelihood; they turned into harlots. In the poem, it is seen that the harlot, who is the epitome of all harlots, herself suffers and then in turn curses the tradition of marriage and married people. She also curses the infant's birth. It means that she does not want children to be born either to herself or to others because they will be born into a poor and miserable life, and therefore, new birth is not a happy event rather it is something that continues the cycle of misery. The harlot is a generic figure in "London", through which Blake expresses his deep worry and strong condemnation of the society. "Harlot" suggests here the truth behind the respectable idea of marriage. In the last line of the poem Blake created perhaps one of the strongest figures of speech in poetry known as oxymoron: "Marriage hearse". On the whole marriage is associated with such noble ideas as love, happiness, loyalty, unity, harmony, a new life, a new beginning, devotion etc. and such noble actions as to love, to make someone happy, to share, to sacrifice and so on. And hearse is a vehicle used to carry the dead body in a coffin to a funeral. Blake, by means of such a juxtaposition of marriage and hearse, suggests that wedding carriage is a hearse leading people to a kind of death. The marriage of the miserable is nothing more than death, for Blake. The term "plague" suggests the diseases sexually transmitted and ending with a fatal conclusion. So for the speaker the curse of the "youthful harlot" is probable to be real; it should be considered to be a real destructive power threatening the future life in London as well as in England and the whole world.

When Blake's poem is put in its historical context, prostitution or the concept of impurity associated with it, and the concept of marriage in London life in the 18th century needs to be dealt with. To understand the reason for the harlot's curse and her wretchedness in "London", the poem should be contextualized. Only in this way, the extent of her misery will become understandable and it will also become clear why the harlot wants children not to be born. In other words, it can be argued that the meaning here depends on the context. By the end of the eighteenth century as reported by Brant and Whyman "prostitution and theft were visible parts of street life" in London (6). The historical evidence for the street life of the 18th - century London suggests that the street employment ranged from beggars, porters, "the chimney sweeps, oyster sellers, link boys and purveyors of hand bills" (Hitchcock, 75) to prostitutes. Hitchcock notes that poor women "were typical of the large number who made a casual living on the streets, either as porters, or prostitutes (if they could), or beggars or shoeblacks, or as casual domestics" (81). It is also reported that "many of the people

working on London's streets […] were simply desperate", "they were on the verge of starvation", so "the boundary between begging and working was always a very subtle one. Frequently women would go from door to door, asking for broken food, or a bit of household work (Hitchcock, 80-81). So such scenes were ubiquitous in London streets in the 18th century. Hitchcock also points out that in the street employment women took part more than men and children, and "London poverty was dominated by women, and characterized by illness, old age and pregnancy" (80). Poverty was pervading to the extent that thousands of girls were forced into prostitution. Henceforth, prostitution was rife in London as well as brothels throughout the 18th century. It is accounted that there were notorious places in London. "The precincts from Charing Cross to Drury Lane were the favourite haunt of streetwalkers" and "gentlemen might indulge in more romantic erotic activities at the 'Folly', a pleasure boat" and "the crowded, cheery streets around Covent Garden and up into Soho were a man's world" (Porter, 171-172). Destitution was seen as the major cause of prostitution, therefore prostitution was considered an element of plebeian behaviour (Gray, 172). The equation between prostitution and poverty and begging is commonly made by the critics. Namely, it is noted that there was "a strong correlation between poverty and prostitution" (Gray, 129) and "from service to prostitution to beggary were two very short steps indeed" (Hitchcock, 92). Hitchcock writes: "The women who tried to wrest a living from the lust of male Londoners were […] objects of charity. A careful observer could not help but notice their beggarly characteristics […] it is clear that commercial sex was more an outpost of poverty than anything else" (93). He also notes that "the boundaries between prostitution and begging […] were illusory" (113). It is known that, in London in the 18th century, "not all prostitutes were entirely destitute" and there were secluded prostitutes and some women who cohabited with men as prostitutes. Despite this fact, prostitution is directly related with destitution because there were many prostitutes on streets living in abject misery and poverty. Ackroyd states that "the shelters of London" became "the homes of the dispossessed" (477). The external appearances of prostitutes reveal the fact that prostitutes were recognized as socially inferior and outcasts as well. They are known to be dirty, to have an unpleasant smell and have dressed poorly. Most of them were street walkers destitute of lodging; and they had a ragged appearance and toothless mouths because of syphilis. They had some other venereal diseases though the symptoms were not visible externally. Their disability and children went together with their rags and poverty (Hitchcock, 100-119). All of them indicate the misery prostitutes in the 18th-century London were subjected to.

Contextualizing Blake's poem clarifies not only the miserable conditions of prostitutes and their lack of social graces but also the misery their children were plunged into. In the poem it is said that the harlot's curse blasts "the new-born Infant's tear", which implies the idea that the harlot curses the infant's birth. This may be attached to the fact that many women with small children were prostitutes and they were ubiquitous in London streets in the 18th century. Both child abuse and turning out to be an orphan or a prostitute were the other dangers waiting for children. It is known that babies and children were used for the purpose of begging. Children were exploited by their own mothers as well to "touch the compassion of passers-by" as accounted by Hitchcock:

> Many women with small children used them to deflect the accusations and expectations of prostitution. Mothers with children also had the great advantage that they were essentially able-bodied. They could follow a likely almsgiver down the street, and encourage their children to use, 'pray's and whines to touch the heart' and to reward any benefaction with 'blessings and acclamations'. Being able to move, even if encumbered with children, meant that people coming out of coaches could be more easily approached; while the ebb and flow of the city crowd could be allowed to dictate which squares and corners should be targeted at particular times of day (119).

Attitudes toward prostitution and prostitutes in the 18th century will help understand "the harlot"s curse on marriage in Blake's poem. Though sexual impurity was considered a social evil, prostitutes were often treated with disdain and blamed for their own situation. Prostitution was seen a sinful act and vice; so prostitutes were also recognized as morally inferior. Many had no sympathy or understanding for prostitutes. It is reported that prostitution was called "the great sin of great cities", "the great social evil" and "London's curse", and the notion of "impure woman, lost girl, unmarried mother and adulterous wife" was prevalent in the society. The labels such as 'lost girls', "lewd and disorderly women" (Gray, 118) were also common. The other titles used clandestinely are "women of the town, women of doubtful reputation, nymphs of the pavé [pavement], prima donna, and women of pleasure" and "fallen women" (Basch, 195). This will suffice to show the society's approach to prostitution.

The concept of marriage in the 18th century will also be helpful in creating the necessary context to interpret the 'harlot's" case in "London". In the 18th century, marriages were arranged by the families – these are known

as 'marriage of convenience', 'contracted marriage' or 'arranged marriage' – and the status of the families was considered to be important rather than the love between the couples. "The importance of money in any decision to contract or postpone a marriage hardly needs stating. Although marriages of convenience, arranged by parents, were previously more common, economic considerations, accentuated by status-seeking, continued to dominate" (Basch, 26). Therefore it can be said that "this type of marriage of 'interest and convenience' was an everyday practice" (Basch, 75) in the 18th century and it was powerfully kept on in the 19th century. Besides, the concept of idealized woman had been so powerful in English social life and it was still prevalent in the 18th century. Purity was always associated with young unmarried ladies. The belief seems to have supported the act of prostitution. Acton, pointing out the fact that while the young man has known "a handful of mistresses and courtesans" before his marriage, young girls, "the future wife-mothers […] are ignorant and incapable of any sexual impulses", gives the concept of idealized woman in his *Functions and Disorders,* as in the following: "The perfect picture of an English wife and mother, kind, considerate, self-sacrificing … so pure-hearted as to be utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence, but so unselfishly attached to the man she loves, as to be willing to give up her own wishes and feelings for his sake (Cited in Basch, 9). The concept in itself requires chastity of woman, loyalty to husband and devotion to marriage. Though the following notions were rejected by the reformers in the 19th century, they were prevalent in the 18th century. As Bartley writes, "the stock argument for prostitution was that it preserved the virtue of young women". As reported by Olsen "there were a huge numbers of women in prostitution and many men chose to get their sexual gratification from prostitutes" (79). Prostitution was seen as "inevitable because of the need to protect the chastity of good and virtuous women from men's insatiable sexual appetite" (Bartley, 6). However, it should not be taken for granted that married men did not receive service from prostitutes. Bartley in his account of European morals pinpoints the different approaches toward sexual freedom of men and women. While the men were enjoying such a freedom - a freedom which necessitates the existence of prostitutes – there was a social expectation of chastity in women.

> Within marriage too, different rules applied. Monogamy in women was considered essential but men enjoyed greater sexual latitude since the emotional, psychological and physical make-up of the sexes was thought to differ. Sexual desire in men was considered to be overpowering whereas in women it was passive and controllable. Married men, who were willing to pay

> for the means of satisfying their sexual needs, therefore needed prostitutes to avoid pestering their wives too much. Reformers, however, rejected the doctrine that prostitution was inevitable because of the need to protect the chastity of good and virtuous women from men's insatiable sexual appetite. By the end of the nineteenth century, they had turned the biological explanation upside down, but like an upturned photograph it was nonetheless recognisable. Reformers may well have demanded that men be as chaste as women but their version still rested on the assumption that men were the aggressive sex who, lacking the natural biological urge to remain monogamous and virtuous, needed to curb their passionate tendencies (Bartley, 6)

Prostitution is said to be not an illegal action but a stigmatized activity. Prostitution was in itself the cause of the penalty of prostitutes. In other words, "in fact, prostitutes were penalized by the legal system simply because they were prostitutes. Actions which would not constitute an infringement of the law by 'respectable' women were illegal if committed by known prostitutes: loitering for example was not in itself a criminal offence and became so only if practiced by women thought to be prostitutes" (Bartley, 4). The association between alcohol and prostitution seems to have marginalized prostitutes who had already been marginalized due to their poverty. In the 18th century alehouses and gin shops were the places where prostitutes could often be found. Generally speaking, "drink was closely associated with prostitution. Alcohol was thought to stimulate the animal passions while lowering the moral so that a woman that drinks will do anything" (Bartley, 6). Drinking also "roused other male appetites" as Porter suggests (171). The relation between prostitution and alcohol seems to be inevitable because most of the prostitutes were poor and homeless:

> Alcohol was freely available. There were inns and taverns serving food and drinks alongside entertainment; alehouses and gin shops which catered for a less-discerning consumer, barrows and cellars where even cheaper drink could be found and consumed […] London had a drinking culture that was 'interwoven with everyday life. The alehouse was an essential part of the community […] They were also home to many of London's prostitutes, especially on the long river border, their landlords well aware of the symbiotic relationship between the alcohol and the sex trade (Gray, 119).

All these approaches of society to prostitutes, prostitution, marriage and the concept of chastity seem to suffice to indicate the marginalization of prostitutes. As a conclusion, it can be said that in "London" through the image of "harlot", Blake once again shows his readers a reduction of the human being to the marginalized as he does in the cases of the "Chimney-sweeper" and the "hapless Soldier". Giving all these contextual facts, it has been aimed to clarify the meaning of the last stanza of the poem in which "the youthful Harlot's curse", "the new-born Infant's tear" and "Marriage hearse" were all employed as important images.

It can also be argued that Blake constructs a recycle of the miserable life of the poor by means of the images he employed in the last two lines of the poem. Life for the poor beginning from their infancy – what is referring to this idea in the poem is "the new-born Infant's tear" – till death – the reference to this is "hearse" – is a doomed one as a result of the marriage blighted "with plagues". Briefly, people from birth to death, for Blake, are doomed to the same misery.

At the end of this study it can be concluded that the New Historicist approach to William Blake's "London" has enabled us to historicize the poem, interpret it as a historical and cultural document produced through the prevailing values of the time in which the poem was written and finally to read the poem as a text resisting the hegemonic forces of the time in which it was produced. Of course Blake does this with the strength of his pen. It is this new interpretation of "London" that makes us recognize Blake as an independent thinker and mentor whose work reflects his original criticism against and his resistance to the orthodoxies of the 18th century. The meaning of the poem has been observed to be dependent on the context. For this reason contextualization has taken a great part in the study. The conclusions reached at the end of this study are firstly that "London" is a poem which was shaped by – because it took its material from history and provides the reader with many things about the history of the time in which it was written – and responsive to such different social and cultural pressures as the Enlightenment rationality, industrialism, materialism and mechanization of the 18th century, which, Blake believes, made people imprisoned both physically and mentally; and secondly the government, the monarchy and the Church in the England of its time, all of which, Blake argues, pressurized people, exploited them. Blake is observed to be the voice of the depressed, the 'Other', the marginalized, and the abject in "London", which makes the poem still worth reading for a 21^{rst}- century-reader. It is Blake's critical eye on the politics and the hegemony of the time and also his real feel for the plight of the wretched and the oppressed which enabled him to be the voice

of the 'Other'. His sheer understanding of the poor living in the 18th century and their abject misery made Blake express their wretched condition in the poem though Blake as the speaker seems to be observing and hearing them from a distance. "London" is a counter-hegemonic poem in the sense that it not only depicts the wretchedness and the misery of the poor who were exploited by the authority in the late years of the 18th century but also has signs warning of the misery of the wretched and oppressed; and in this regard it is prophetic. Blake has been observed to become the champion of the poor and the miserable through his poem. In "London" it is felt that Blake's primary aim is historical and factual. It is true that the poem involves romantic elements and yet Blake seems to have employed them to bring the historical facts to the fore. The poem is a severe social criticism and a protest. In the poem, in a sense, the wealthy industrialists, the rational man, the spiritual leaders, the political rulers of the time are all accused of enslavement of people of various ages – infants, children, soldiers, men and young women. The poem involves a deeper meaning that lies behind the words. In "London" the words which are so familiar for the reader have turned out to be powerful images, through which Blake created his social critique. Associating the Church with exploitation, the politics of the time with war, and marriage with prostitution and death, Blake constructs a powerful criticism towards the ruling classes and hegemonic forces of the time in which he produced "London". Blake's choice of the characters also enabled him to portray the age as it was and the social ills of the time. The "Chimney-sweeper", "the hapless Soldier" and "the youthful Harlot" are all generalized; and behind these figures are the common people living under the pressure of the Church and monarchy and suffering from the miserable life conditions due to the social systems. All these figures in the poem are represented as the victims in the industrial life of London. The only person who sees and hears them is the speaker; and it is this speaking persona who makes them seen and heard by the others. Thus Blake becomes, in his poem, the voice of the 'Other' and of the poor, the miserable, the exploited, the oppressed, the repressed, the dependant, the restricted, the imprisoned, the chained, the conscripted, and the marginalized. Blake, showing such a deep sympathy for the poor, displays his agony and indignation for the abusing governmental, monarchic and religious institutions. "London" being quantitatively a small poem seems to be giving small facts but it speaks to large issues. Through Blake's "London", we have seen how a poet produces, through the power of his/her pen, a strong response to government, administration or institutions pressurizing their people, and how poetry, in the hands of an accomplished poet, turns out to be a means of resistance against the hegemonic power and authority.

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