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Analysis of the British Industrial  
Revolution in cinema: Oliver Twist

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## ABSTRACT

The British Industrial Revolution was a historical phenomenon that even to this day continues attracting attention. Its dimensions were such that nowadays its consequences are still visible. The aim of this project is to analyze the social impact of the British Industrial Revolution and the causes that lead to this point as portrayed in *Oliver Twist*, our selected film. From the perspective of labour injustices and social inequalities, the study focuses on the social consequences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The project is divided into two main parts: the first one deals with the presentation and interpretation of the selected film, whereas the second one focuses on the analysis and study of it followed by a subsequent comparison with material from other sources.

**Keywords:** Industrial Revolution, social consequences, filmography, society, proletariat, transformation process.

La Revolución Industrial británica fue un fenómeno histórico que incluso a día de hoy continúa atrayendo miradas. Sus dimensiones fueron tales que actualmente sus consecuencias aún son visibles. El objetivo de este proyecto es analizar el impacto social de la Revolución Industrial británica y las causas que llevaron a este punto como retrata *Oliver Twist*, la película seleccionada. Desde la perspectiva de las injusticias laborales y las desigualdades sociales, el estudio se centra en las consecuencias sociales del siglo 19. El proyecto está dividido en dos partes principales: la primera se centra en la presentación e interpretación de la película seleccionada, mientras que la segunda se centra en su análisis y estudio seguido de una posterior comparativa con material proveniente de otras fuentes.

**Palabras clave:** Revolución Industrial, consecuencias sociales, filmografía, sociedad, proletariado, proceso de transformación.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives (William James)*

The Industrial Revolution, according to the definition given by Paul Mantoux in *The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century*, is a “movement arising from a growing division of labour, a widening of markets and the adoption of new devices by ordinary people. Due attention was paid to changes in speculative thought and in the attitude of the State to economic life” (2005: p. 19). In fact, the Industrial Revolution meant one of the most significant examples of discontinuity in history: a decisive step was taken from a world in what population and rents advanced slowly, near to a standstill point, to a period which economy and society began to develop at a dizzying rate looking for the growth of individual freedom.

The terms “transformation” and “change” are common for all periods of history. They are terms that transmit suspicion, uncertainty, urgency, social discomfort and are associated with structural change and social adjustment thoughts. In that sense, the period comprehended between 1750 and 1850 is the perfect example of the so-called “transformation period”.

This paper is divided into two main sections. It analyzes the social impact of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and how this was portrayed in the cinema. We based our analysis on Roman Polanski’s film *Oliver Twist* in order to focus on social, demographical, and urban conditions of the film and analyzing how these elements contradict or confirm the ideas and aesthetics expressed in the film.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this final year dissertation is to analyze the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the analysis of Roman Polanski's film *Oliver Twist* (2005). The study will be structured in two main parts.

The aspects covered in the first part will be based on the display and subsequent interpretation of the film. It is necessary to emphasize the historical antecedents that triggered a severe change on the economical, political, and cultural facet in order to comprehend the profound social changes occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It constitutes the most methodological part of the paper which will approach the phenomenon of Industrial Revolution from a semiotic viewpoint.

The second part of the paper will consist in the analysis of the social consequences perceived in the film. The elaboration of this part is constituted by the process of recognition, comparison, and contrasting between the characteristics perceived in the film and historical facts.

Therefore, the objective of the project is to analyze the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Great Britain and the social consequences which derived from the historical period and how they were portrayed in *Oliver Twist*.



### 3. JUSTIFICATION

The importance and influence of the Industrial Revolution in modern history is an issue of great importance, not only for the historic magnitude of the phenomenon, but for its repercussion in current times. It is necessary to know the antecedents in order to understand the great economic and social changes happened in XIX century. As we know, it supposed a revolutionary phenomenon that introduces a new economic system based on the change of several factors. It was produced a revolution in agricultural and technological levels and, as a consequence, it also affected the population who grew at an accelerated pace.

In the academic course 2010/11, we studied a subject called ‘Cultura y Sociedad de los Países de Habla Inglesa’. One of the topics of the subject dealt with the study of the Industrial Revolution and its consequences. The subject resulted very enriching and the study of this topic made me curious and interested in this particular time of history. Unfortunately, the syllabus of the subject was quite dense and we could not dedicate the time we would have liked, so always remained on me the curiosity about this topic. Along the different courses of the degree we also had several subjects dealing with British literature at different times, when we studied the literature produced during the Industrial Revolution. But even though both the historical and literary aspects were profusely dealt with in the course, there still remained one aspect that made me undertake this project: how the facts exposed in a literary way, or the raw data of historical facts did not cover the cultural aspect of the representation of the history of humankind in images.

I found out that the cinema is a magnificent device to attract the attention of the reader through an emphatic relationship between the images and the audience. This empathy is what creates in the audience a sense of belonging. What I mean by that is that the semiotic play between the plot and the visual impact convinces the spectators more powerfully than the written text. Therefore, even though the relationship between the different filmic versions of *Oliver Twist* and the work of Dickens have been studied in depth, the innovative approach I would like to present is that the cinema makes us interpret

and understand historical facts in an emotional way. In the case of the Industrial Revolution, economic historians agree that it was a great step forward in the economic development of the countries, while sordid aspects such as diseases, child exploitation and pollution are kept as inevitable consequences to achieve a greater end. In the literary construction of the story, the terrible consequences of inhuman after-effects are constraint to a particular character created by an author, while the exposure of a particular story on the screen extrapolates the particular story and turns it into a universal characteristic that persuades the spectator that the Industrial Revolutions was, in fact, a great misfortune for mankind.

#### **4. THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

In this section we are going to analyze the causes and repercussion of the Revolution in the population. The film focuses on the life of an individual who suffers what the revolution provoked in the population of London in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The focalization on a particular individual arises in the spectator a feeling of empathy and sympathy. It appears that other historical considerations regarding economy, the emergence of a new ruling class, the spread of literacy, the burgeoning of tourism, etc. are considered as secondary elements in the evolution of mankind.

##### **4.1 WHAT IS THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION?**

After the French Revolution and especially over the first quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century, European society started a profound transformation process in multiple facets. In most advanced countries, the bourgeoisie became the new ruling class and eliminated ancient economical and social structures which characterized the Ancient Régime. Focusing on England in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it experienced a profound transformation in all forms of labour and the entire social structure. England suffered an economic and radical social change which derived in the birth of the capitalist society, phenomenon better known as Industrial Revolution.

Since the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, firstly in England and later on in the rest of the European continent, the industrial system made its way as a new production system. The new system was based in three main principles: the division of work, the use of efficient machines, and the development of new energy sources. However, the Industrial Revolution was not just the apparition of the industrial activity and the manufacturing process. It was a complete transformation of the society which affected the totality of social areas. It was a slow and unstoppable process and a constant change in continuous growing. The combination of several factors explains the development of the Industrial Revolution in England.

#### **4.2 CAUSES OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

According to *The Causes of the Industrial Revolution in England* (1967) by the economic historian Ronald Max Hartwell, the term Industrial Revolution started to be used in 19<sup>th</sup> century and it is considered inappropriate to transmit the magnitude of the transformation process. It was a process that affected not only industrial activity but also the economical, social, and cultural activity, between many other aspects. Great Britain at first, and then Belgium, France, and Germany were the countries where the productivity raised as a consequence of several causes:

1. An increase of population was experienced due to a significant reduction in epidemics along the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Also, due to the development of agriculture that offered better nourishment and, in conclusion, lower mortality rates of population. The great demographic expansion experimented by England in 18<sup>th</sup> century have different causes: firstly, overcoming against plagues and epidemics thanks to sanitary measures. Secondly, the improvement in diet thanks to potatoes and legumes farming.

2. The government of England promoted different ordinances to settle foreign colonies. Despite of migration, in the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century the population of England grew in 95%. London had around 1 million residents and it was the most populous city of Europe. Also, Manchester and Liverpool transformed in great metropolis.

3. The Industrial Revolution promoted the growth of cities, places where railways converged, ships operated, and factories are concentrated. England had many seaports that facilitated the national and international commerce. Also, the construction of canals facilitated the development of the market, important fact for future investments. The improvement in transportation was favoured by the appearance of new inventions, which facilitated the transport of larger amount of products to further distances in less time. London concentrated the British marine transports in 18<sup>th</sup> century, and later on it was substituted by the city of Manchester. Liverpool was the epicenter of textile industry.

4. The British agriculture experienced several transformations in early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Fundamentally, they were applied to new farming methods and improvements in livestock techniques having big consequences, for instance, the growing of productivity that allowed feeding a greater number of people, technical improvements which reduced the number of peasants working in farming activities, and the growing in steel industry because of the new techniques required for the production of machines. It was introduced a new farming system called Norfolk based on the sowing of new products on a broad scale. However, the typical enclosures of British agriculture supposed a big problem. Progressively, the landowners got more and more properties and peasants were obliged to go out to larger cities in order to find work as a workforce in factories.

5. The traffic of raw material and manufactured products need a fast and secure international trade and in 18<sup>th</sup> century it was only possible by sea. Products like tea, tobacco, and slave trade had created great fortunes which provided cities a great variety of raw materials and abundant workforce. In short, the Industrial Revolution does not come to its lasts consequences without an improvement in highways and railways. In that sense, England was the pioneer country in the construction of highways. In 1815, it was built the first highway for private use. At the same time, the British industry was developing an important system of navigable channels. This fact, linked to paddle steamer, let an easy and economic transport of coal from mining industry to big cities. The last invention that revolutionized the economical and social panorama of 18<sup>th</sup> century was the locomotive. The

development of the railway was decisive for the process of modernization in travel transportation but also for the expansion of steel and coal industries, which were able to increase production greatly.

6. Political stability based on a solid liberal monarchy that allowed British population left out any liberal revolution of the rest of Europe and America. Also, England had an enviable financial structure led by the Bank of England which financed all costs. The accumulation of necessary capital for the great investments was based on the enrichment of landowners thanks to slave trade.

These characteristics and symptoms of revolution were clearly visible in the textile industry of Lancashire region. This region, next to Liverpool, the majority of companies were installed that transported slaves and textile material and imported cotton, between other materials.

#### **4.3 THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN CINEMA**

Cinema and history are two aspects that fit and complement each other perfectly. Cinema becomes the medium of expression for the societies of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. This technique is very useful for history because it is the showcase in terms of historical values, ideals, political, economical and social worries. It is also valid for cinema in the sense that films can show a society at a specific historical period, as is indicated in *El cine, una vision de la historia* written by Marc Ferro, 2007.

Along the history, there are several films that focus and represent the phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution. *Germinal*, *Modern Times*, and *Daens* are some titles of films that focus on this topic. In our particular case, *Oliver Twist* is a contemporary film that shows the social inequalities and injustices arising in 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a film that can be used as a learning tool. In general terms, all of the films dealing with Industrial Revolution are developed under a common script: the economic issue which changed the way of life, and the changes in production means where the human force was substituted by animal

force. In agreement with this statement, *Oliver Twist* is a film that exploits the sentimental level from the figure of an orphan child. This technique, to immerse the audience in the life of a character and to feel as one's own his adventures and misfortunes: this is a common technique used to awake the sentiments.

All of the changes in production means brought with them a change in economic terms: the entrance in capitalism and the socioeconomic situation of middle and lower social classes changed. It is the starting point of our investigation, to analyze the changes in social, economical, and cultural terms. *Oliver Twist* represents and moves perfectly well in the parameters of exclusion and marginalization of lower social classes, and tries to represent the sacrifices and hardships of these classes. The film is an honest reproduction of the social conditions of life in this tumultuous period. As I said in the introductory paragraph, the Industrial Revolution is a recurring topic in cinema and it is useful to go a step further and awake the empathy of the audience.

## **5. ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED FILM: OLIVER TWIST**

In this section we are going to analyze the film *Oliver Twist* and the aspects that we consider relevant for the nature of the project. We are going to elaborate an extensive summary of the plot focusing, on the second part of the section, in the main themes represented in the film. As we will see, poverty in lower social classes, heartless treatment of children, criminality, corrupt society, lethal diseases, difficult labor conditions, economic misery, poor children education, and hungry people are some of the social topics represented in the film.

### **5.1 OLIVER TWIST**

*Oliver Twist* is a film directed by the French producer Roman Polanski. It is based on the classic novel *Oliver Twist* written by the British novelist Charles Dickens (the book was written in 1837 and the film was produced in 2005). Roman Polanski turns Charles

Dickens adventures' about an orphan child into a moving story about the fight between good and evil.

Charles Dickens was a writer who wrote about the social conditions of life during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it is clearly represented in his novel *Oliver Twist*. Years later, there were many artists that adapted the novel to different areas such as theatre and cinema. In that sense, the French producer and director Roman Polanski was one of them who adapted the novel to the cinema. The sense of the novel is to show the differentiated social classes, between the slums of London and the crowded streets of the new industrialized city of London. A detailed way the script of the film follows.

### **5.1.1 PLOT OF THE FILM**

In a poor hospice of the south of England, Oliver Twist and the rest of the orphans are starving. They flipped a coin to decide who of them will ask the director for more vegetable stew and Oliver is chosen for the difficult task. One evening at the dinner, after a poor portion, Oliver moves closer to the table of the hospice's director and asks for some more food. The director cannot believe his request and after several disputes Oliver is expelled out of the orphanage and is offered as apprentice to anyone who would want him.

After avoiding being delivered to a chimney sweep, a dangerous job where children were introduced into dirty chimneys with the risk to die of asphyxia, Oliver becomes the apprentice of Mr. Sowerberry, an upper class man who manages a small company of funeral services. In this job, Oliver is bullied and intimidated with constant insults about him and his deceased mother. In an outburst, Oliver hits Noah Claypole, the daughter of his adoptive parents. After all, Oliver escapes from the house and runs away to the big city of London.

On the slums of London, Oliver is exhausted and hungry. He is abandoned like a homeless. At that moment of the film, Oliver meets Artful Dodger, a teenager who offers Oliver a house where he can spend the night. Oliver is an innocent child and he does not

know where he is moving: Oliver enters a band of thieves led by the sinister Fagin. In his house of the slum of London he also meets other characters, such as the dangerous Bill Sykes, his girlfriend Nancy, his dog Turko, and the rest of children who form the band of thieves.

One morning, Oliver goes out with Artful Dodger and Charley Bates, two of the children of Fagin, and Oliver becomes aware of the problematic and dangerous job they have. They steal for a living: wallets, jewels, scarves, or clocks, and products in the market, such as fruits, bread, and baking. In this robbery, Dodger steals the scarf of Mr. Brownlow, an upper class man, and Oliver is accused of the robbery. Oliver is taken to the police station. There, Oliver is worn out and he suffers dizziness. Finally, one viewer proves the innocence of Oliver and the pleasant Mr. Brownlow takes Oliver himself and goes to his comfortable home in a residential district of London. Meanwhile, Fagin and Bill Sykes are worried about the possible treachery of Oliver so they want to find him in order to take him back to Fagin's hideout.

Mr. Brownlow is really fond of Oliver and is convinced about the honesty of the child, so he ordered Oliver to pay 5£ to the librarian and returns him some books. During the route, Oliver is captured by Nancy and Sykes. Mr. Brownlow, thinking that Oliver escapes with the money, ends up believing that the child was a thief and he lost the confidence on him. It was a terrible disappointment for Mr. Brownlow.

Back to Fagin's hideout, Oliver is manipulated by Fagin and the child talks about the valuable objects and possessions of Mr. Brownlow. Bill Sykes and his friend, the criminal Toby Crackit, force Oliver to commit a robbery in the house of Mr. Brownlow. They need a little child to enter the house from the window and to open the main door. The robbery is not completed and Oliver was shot in his arm, a fact that causes profuse bleeding. Finally, Oliver ends again in Fagin's hideout where the child is taken care of his injuries.



Sykes still wants to kill Oliver and says so to Fagin. The child is seen as a risk for the rest of the band of thieves. However, Nancy feels sorry about Oliver and contacts Mr. Brownlow in London Bridge at midnight. Fagin orders Dodger to follow and spy her. Then, Bill Sykes discovers her treachery and kills Nancy in a fit of rage. The next day, Bet, a friend of Nancy, discovers the dead body and communicates it to the police. The hunting of Bill Sykes has begun.

Mr. Brownlow is worried about the safety of Oliver, and even more when the police had located Sykes and Oliver in the house of Toby Crackit, who lives in the slums of London. When the police corner Sykes, he uses Oliver as a shield, whereas he escapes across the roofs. Suddenly, Sykes is distracted by his dog and he slips off and hangs himself accidentally with a piece of string.

Soon after, Oliver and Mr. Brownlow visit Fagin in Newgate Prison where the thief goes crazy. Oliver does not give importance to the past and feels sympathy and pity for Fagin. Finally, Oliver prays for Fagin who will be hanged in public judgment and begins his new life with Mr. Brownlow.

### **5.1.2 ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN THEMES**

As a continuation of the film interpretation, we will make an exhaustive and critical analysis about the principal topics dealing with the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution.

*Oliver Twist* is a film and faithful reflection of the situation of children in latest 18<sup>th</sup> century and beginnings of 19<sup>th</sup> century. As we have seen, Oliver Twist is an orphan child who grew in a hospice. Later on, he fell a victim of child labor exploitation in hands of a ploy of delinquency. This critical story is one of the most moving films about the treatment of children. And the worst of all is that it is not exempt of realism. The film is also valid to see that in the luxurious, refined, and educated 'Victorian era' everything perfect was far from perfect.

Poverty in lower social classes, heartless treatment of children, criminality, corrupt society, lethal diseases, difficult labor conditions, economic misery, poor children education, and hungry people are some of the social topics presented in the film. These characteristics affected directly the protagonist of the film, Oliver Twist.

At the end of 1830 and beginnings of the Victorian era everything went extremely well: the Industrial Revolution positioned England in a privileged place around the world. However, Charles Dickens published his book *Oliver Twist* and it supposed a moving social shock. Dickens published a realistic novel where the author attacked the moral hypocrisy of social institutions whose measures were a cover about the hard social conditions.

The death rate was superior to the birth rate and it became one of the priorities of the government. For this reason, sanitary and health measures were established in order to prevent deaths. In the slums of London, the growth of population was negative and the number of people born was not enough to counteract the number of deaths. Hunger, tuberculosis in adults, and measles or smallpox in children were the common causes of death in people's life expectancy did not go beyond 40 years of age.

There was another aspect that favored the estrangement between upper and lower social classes: properties and riches. There were two main groups, the aristocracy and upper classes, such as bourgeoisie, who controlled commerce, industry, and political power. In the lower level and too distant to this social stratum there were workers who had not voice in the social activity. Progressively, created social movements developed which derived in large political movements. But even within the lower social stratum there existed divisions. They were not the same those who had qualified jobs and those who did not. Special mention should be made of women and children, known as sunken people, who live in extreme poverty and who worked in the most dangerous and poorly remunerated jobs. Finally, poverty and criminality were two activities very common. Normally, they were children who practiced these activities.

## **6. MAIN SUBJECTS AND ASPECTS IN FILMS: GROWTH AND PROSPERITY UNDER THE CAPITALIST OPPRESSION**

In this section we are going to analyze the evolution of industrialized cities, such as London, Liverpool, or Manchester. These cities suffered a profound change both in urban and demographic terms. One of the most visible consequences of the industrialization was the different class between rich and poor people. We will focus on the emergence of a new social class, known as proletariat. Also, we will focus on the figure of the new industries, its tyranny and the control that exerted over the workers.

### **6.1 URBAN CHANGES**

Here we will discuss the progressive evolution of the industrialized cities. In this section we will analyze the consequences of the massive arrival of population from rural areas to the new industrialized cities due to the search of a better standard of life.

#### **6.1.1 POPULATION: THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW CLASS**

At present, we are familiarized with the problem of working communities such as mining, steelworks, or fishing regions. However, the period comprehended between 1750 and 1850 was significantly different because employment and community were quite more connected than nowadays. Rural towns were the places where agricultural work was the principal source of economic incomes. As we know, work in rural areas was gradually substituted by work in big industrial cities where workers took part in an exhausting manufacturing work. These changes made lower classes reflect on it and be aware that they were part of a new social class. These changes gave way to the first protest movements and, as a consequence, the creation of the Trade Union (Rule, 1990).

Following, we will talk about the social consequences that the emergence of the new proletariat class had within this new social framework. We will analyze the morphological and demographical changes of the industrial city of London resulted,

principally, as a consequence of the massive migratory movements. Finally, we will explain the newly established social class better known as proletariat and the control by the new capitalist system, headed by entrepreneurs and wealthy people, over the rest of the population. In the next paragraphs we will explain all of these aspects and we will see how it was reflected in *Oliver Twist*.

### **6.1.2 GROWTH OF CITIES**

The Industrial Revolution had deep consequences on multiple aspects such as the social, economical, cultural, industrial, and it also affected the increase of population and the radical differences in its movement following a sudden economic growth. One of the most significant effects of the Industrial Revolution was the fast urbanization of cities and the change in society lifestyle. The major consequence of migratory movement was clear: an unequal distribution of population that ended up in a massive overcrowded population living in subhuman conditions.

From the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a sudden demographic growth due to the previous mentioned causes in section 4.2 *Causes of the Industrial Revolution*. As a consequence, a population shift happened from countryside to cities, better known as rural exodus. The formula was clear: there were too many people in cities which were the places where work was accessible. At the beginning, cities like London, Liverpool, and Manchester could welcome the massive arrival of population but, later on, this fact was unsustainable. A great instability emerged between the population that lived in cities and towns. A real example happened in the county of Dorset, where their population increased 40% between 1801 and 1831. It also happened in Manchester, city that multiplied ten-fold the number of inhabitants between 1760 and 1860, from 17.000 to 180.000 inhabitants (Rule, 1990: p. 118).

Mainly, the reason for the migratory movement was an economic motif. People were looking for economic independence and they accepted any workplace without keeping in mind labour conditions, work schedule or salary. The new factory work led to a need for

a strict system of factory discipline and society agreed to enter into the capitalist dynamic: it was the ground for capitalism. According to that statement, there was the apparition of companies, future social inequalities which ended in the birth of proletariat, and a deterioration and degradation of the environment result of the industrialization. For example, in the mid-fifties “many European cities were centers of industrial growth. In fact, by 1850, over 50% of the entire population of Great Britain lived in either a town or a city instead of in a rural community” according to Annez and Buckley in *Urbanization and Growth* (2009).

Following, to make the explanation more visual and comprehensive, we will take five maps and a several tables which show the demographic evolution of the city London. It constitutes a useful material to explain the development of the city from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to 1860 in the case of the maps, and to the current times in the case of the tables. Through the maps, we can analyze the progressive growth and expansion of the city. (Appendix I)

The interpretation of the maps shows a predictable conclusion: we observe a growth in the radius of the city. We perceive a progressive growth in the suburbs on the outskirts of the city, especially to the northwest and in all directions. This statement is linked to the data extracted from the graph which indicates the progressive and gradual growth of population both in the inner and outer London. We obtained information from 1801 onwards and it is very useful to perceive the population growth from that point to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Carrying all these ideas to the film we perceive how this aspect is also covered in *Oliver Twist*. We can see how Oliver ran away to London looking for opportunities and a better standard of living. He is a child and he does not know the difficulties that he will find in his adventure, but our interpretation is that Oliver symbolizes a whole social class, the proletariat, who aspires to achieve their dreams and improve their quality of life.

We also perceived a more developed and industrialized London at a boiling point where crowd gathered in the streets. The influence of industrialization is also evident in the architecture of the city. The London of the eighties shows old and damaged buildings where several families of 10, 15, and even 20 people lived in. The final aspect to take into account is the control and pressure that capitalism exercised over the proletariat. As we will see in the next sections, it resulted in an oppression that undermined the expectations of improvement in work and social conditions.

### **6.1.3 THE TYRANNY OF THE NEW INDUSTRIES**

The owners of the new industries were a limited group of people who belonged to a higher social class due to an upper economical and political status. The growth of the economic power favored this higher social class in its objective to achieve an eager socioeconomic status. This group had also been affected by the political measures of the government in its objective to make England a powerful country. The origins of higher social classes resided in little workshops where families produced in small quantities. However, with the growing of the industrial demand, workers had to adapt to the new technologies and, in conclusion, to the development of the industrial machinery.

The industrial panorama in rural areas was the following. Landowners enriched themselves with the combination of agricultural activities and land renting which were worked by farmers. A little group of peasants prospered investing and putting into practice the new farming techniques. Only in the best cases they became rich landowners.

The metropolitan panorama was totally different. Businessmen and manufacturers were the people who, through credits and loans, established their own business. At the beginning these family business were medium-size business but later on they expanded still further. These businesses used cheap labour to grow and expand their limits. In the majority of the cases, as we have seen before, the working conditions were subhuman. The masters controlled workers to their taste. On their behalf, workers complained constantly about the

unsustainable situation. As a characteristic detail, Holy Monday was the only day off of the week for workers.

The working technical and social division was the outstanding characteristic of this capitalist system: manufacturers were socially differentiated from workers. Manufacturers contracted workers who worked in production line system. The introduction of machines and its centralization aggravated the difference between higher and lower social classes. The result of this process was that wealthy people did even more and poor people were sunk into despair with their situation. As a contrast with the industrial proletariat, the economic and social power of entrepreneurs was reinforced, consolidating the capitalist economist system which was characterized by private ownership of the production means and the regularization of the market prizes, according to the supply and demand. This was the panorama in what bourgeoisie ousted aristocracy and landowners and their situation of social privileged was based on the fortune and not in familiar origins. They were guaranteed by an economic freedom doctrine in which the entrepreneurs obtained wealth not only selling and competing, but also paying low rates to the workers.

The tyranny of the new industries is an aspect also visible in *Oliver Twist*. We perceive rejection and abuse in the masters that Oliver had in his apprentice workplaces. The masters of Oliver mistreat him with miserable portions of food and physical abuse.

A testimony of this kind of cruelty is a quote in the online webpage *The Victorians* by historian Mandy Barrow about the shocking conditions children were working. It explains in itself the severity and subhuman situation lived in that time: "*I have two boys working for me. After work their arms and legs are bleeding so I rub them with salt-water before sending them up another chimney.*" (The Victorians, Working children, online webpage).

#### **6.1.4 THE NEW RULED CLASS: THE PROLETARIAT**

The proletariat born in the Industrial Revolution of Great Britain in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the birth of the industrial capitalism and factory system. According to Engels, the manufacturer worker from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century possessed an instrument of production: they possessed a loom to weave their clothes, or a little plot where they cultivated their fruits and vegetables. There existed a monetary and patriarchal relation between the boss and the proletariat (Engels, 1844). According to his words, the work of an industrial economy is based on the work of proletariats who receive a limited salary based on their work.

However, it is important to remark two conditions that favored the growth of the exploitation: the expropriation of the product and the expropriation of the physical nature (Stedman Jones, 1975). Around 1750, England had an economical dependent population and a different work system that distinguished it from other European countries. Wage labor became a must for two-thirds of the whole population and it supposed an essential factor to fit in the capitalist system that was being established.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there existed two types of proletariats. The first proletariat group was composed by those people who worked in their own cottages and with their own looms, completely dependent of the work and who received a limited amount of salary provided by their master, normally a capitalist person. There are historians who consider this and others who do not classify this group as a real proletariat. However, the second group was composed by those people who were clearly subordinated by their master. In this second group the term “proletariat” appears for the first time. This term saves a great relationship with the emergence of the Trade Union, an organization whose membership consists of workers and union leaders, united to protect and promote their common interests.

The gap between patriarchs and poor workers was a clear demonstration about the uneasiness of population, distinguished social positions, and other values that negated the



existence of an only worker class. It is not possible to analyze the social and economical impact over the worker society from 1750 to 1850 only in well-being terms or working conditions because this impact affected the British culture as a whole entity.

To conclude the section, we want to show two real testimonies from worker children that talked in first person about the harsh conditions they were living. These quotes, extracted from the online webpage *The Victorians* by Mandy Barrow, are truthful testimonies about the feelings of the working class. They speak for themselves, there is no need further explanation: *"I start work promptly at 5:00 in the morning and work all day till 9:00 at night. That's 16 hours! We are not allowed to talk, sit or look out of the window whilst we work. The only day off from work I get is on Sundays, when we have to go to church."* It was said by a girl age 9.

The last ones were pronounced by a boy age 7. *"I sit in the dark down in the pit for 12 hours a day. I only see daylight on Sundays when I don't work down the pit. Once I fell asleep and a wagon ran over my leg."* And the following: *"I never got stuck myself but some of my friends have and were taken out dead"*.

There are also testimonies in *Oliver Twist* that glimpse and confirm our theories about the harsh conditions the population was living. They fit perfectly with the quotes previously explained. For instance, the mistreatment children received from adults, being Oliver the object of continuous scorns by his stepfathers, by his chiefs when he was an apprentice, and when he arrived to London at Fagin's hideout and his supporters. Although there are not indications about forced labor in the film, we can perceive suggestions of it in the period when Oliver worked as apprentice. The previous quotes reflect the harshness lived by children like Oliver, children age 7, 8, and 9 that suffered continuous abuses.

## **6.2 DEMOGRAPHICAL CHANGES**

Here we will consider the most human factor. We will see the standard of life for the society. Demography increases because of an improvement in the capital national

income but it was not beneficial to all. We will enumerate and explain the most common diseases and the affective relations at that time. Finally, we will see the improvements in the educational context and how it is reflected in *Oliver Twist*.

### **6.2.1 DEMOGRAPHY AND INCREASE OF LIFE EXPECTATIONS**

From the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century there existed a pessimistic vision about the deteriorating of social conditions of life for lower classes. It is believed that the Industrial Revolution was the trigger factor of this new social impact. In 1926, two main opposing groups emerged: the optimistic group or society who supported the ideas about the industrialization and the pessimistic group or society against this phenomenon and all the consequences derived from it (Rule, 1990: p. 48-52).

The pessimistic group made extreme affirmations in order to provoke those who supported the Industrial Revolution. They said that it was the most catastrophic and horrible period of the history and it produced a profound impoverishment and a degradation of society. However, optimistic statements are the most salient nowadays. Historically, both groups tend to initiate its defense from an economic point of view. The optimistic group talks about an improvement in per capita national income arguing an increase in the average living standard. However, the pessimistic group argues that this improvement is not equal for all social classes. It rewards in a significant way upper social classes and deteriorates the standard of living of the lower social classes.

In general terms, it is evident that there was an improvement in salaries, work opportunities, greatest cultural offer and popular leisure, but all of these improvements were not enjoyed by the middle and lower social classes. As we will see in the next sections, the working class was exhausted by subhuman working conditions with impact on the social aspect. But not only the poor working conditions contributed to the deterioration of social relations, the lack of hygiene and medical care to face the lethal diseases of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the overcrowding population in tiny rooms, and the lack of public security which favored the increasingly frequent robberies were some of them.

## 6.2.2 DISEASES IN NINETEENTH CENTURY

“The asthma of sharpeners, the consumption of knife grinders, the disease of quarry workers, the tuberculosis of miners, the tuberculosis of stonecutters due to the dust which made his lungs ill, etcetera” (Rule, 1990: p. 207). These are the most typical symptoms of illness of the working class during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The idea about strong peasants around the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century faded easily. There were many unhealthy jobs and habits that produced serious diseases.

The causes for the poor health suffered by the working class were clearly visible: poor environmental conditions, severe eating disorders, excessive consumption of alcoholic drinks, or exhausting working days are some of the causes. There were a lot of lethal diseases without medical treatment because did not exist vaccinations to prevent them. Following, we will enumerate the most common diseases of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the presence and repercussion of them in the film. All of the information is extracted from the online webpage *19<sup>th</sup> century diseases* by B. Malheiro.

- **CHICKEN POX**

It was the most common disease of children during the Industrial Revolution. “It appears in the form of little spots, round, not depressed in the centre like those of small-pox. The illness is preceded by symptoms of fever, chills, headache, weariness, and sometimes aching in the back and limbs. Often nothing particular is noticed in the child till the eruption appears as little spots, first over the trunk, and then over the face and limbs. They soon fill with a clear fluid which by the fourth day begins to dry up, in some instances leaving only a slight redness where the pox once appeared.

“Chicken-pox has been thought by some to be a lesser onset of small-pox but was proven not to be so. It is its own distinct disease. Neither vaccination nor small-pox protected one from getting chicken-pox; the disease occurring almost exclusively in

childhood. It should be noted, however, that it is very contagious placing other children in the family at risk of catching it.”

- **CHOLERA**

“One of the most dreaded of all diseases, acutely infectious, caused by drinking water from contaminated sources. Cholera causes a slowing in the blood circulation causing the skin to turn blue and shrunken, with inevitable death. Superstitions have one catching cholera simply because one is afraid of it, and that the sun, comets or too much oxygen in the air caused the disease. Others stopped eating fruits and vegetables as a way to keep from getting the disease because they also were believed to be causes.”

- **DIPHTHERIA**

“Another common childhood disease, highly contagious, is Diphtheria, the formation of a thick gray membrane in a child's throat making it difficult to breathe. Fever and weakness also accompanied the growth and quite often resulted in death. The "bacillus" bacteria is considered to be the cause of the disease. He also determined that as the bacteria flowed through the bloodstream, it damaged cells in the heart.”

- **POLIOMYELITIS**

“Poliomyelitis was another disease that affected primarily children. It attacks the spinal cord and brain, often leaving a child to wake up and find his limbs paralyzed. Only bed rest appeared to offer any help in lessening the affects of the disease.”

- **TUBERCULOSIS**

“Consumption or "tuberculosis" is another common cause of death throughout the century. The term consumption was applied as it described the action of the body tissue wasting away. It is a highly contagious disease and the bacteria which causes it is found to be carried in milk and other foods and sometimes the saliva of a person who has the disease. It was found that only direct sunlight killed the bacteria. In 1882, Robert Koch will

discover that the bacteria that caused the disease begins as fine granules, barely visible to the human eye which would attach and grow in every organ of the body, including the lungs and the brain, either damaging or destroying the organ.”

- **SMALLPOX**

“Another widely feared disease is smallpox. Affecting people of all ages, is especially fatal to young children. Smallpox is caused by a virus which creates small blister-like bumps on the skin and instead the mouth and throat, sometimes swelling causing difficulty in breathing. After catching it, however, and surviving, one does not get it again. This information is used to find a vaccine to prevent the disease.”

- **TYPHUS**

Taking an extract from *Diseases and Human Evolution* (2007: p. 260) we can get an idea about Typhus disease as “For centuries human encounters with rodent fleas infected with rickettsiae had been sporadic. Infection occurred only when humans intruded into areas where the infection reigned among local rodents or other small mammals capable of carrying infected ectoparasites.” Typhus was a disease that affected large amount of population. It is characterized by high fever, shivers, and a severe headache.

Diseases and epidemics is an aspect not clearly represented in *Oliver Twist* but highly important for the correct explanation of the social consequences. We consider the health of society an essential factor to find the equilibrium in the social welfare. Numerous studies have shown that the health of lower social classes got worse during the industrialization period and the cause of this deterioration is linked to the lack of hygiene and medical care to face the lethal diseases. In that sense, the causes for the health impoverishment are none other than what we have pointed out above: long working hours in inadequate postures, an unhealthy working environment that contributed to the apparition of asthma and other lung diseases caused by an excessive heat, cold, or humidity, and a

lack of hygiene both in the working place and at home. The dietary deficit was another cause specially accused by children, as we seen in the film.

We believe the true intention of the film the same as in the novel: to denounce the social corruption, such as child labour or the use of children to commit robberies. From the perspective about social corruption, the film alludes to other derived topics such as delinquency, marginalization, and poverty. The film criticizes the hypocrisy and it is denounced with sarcasm and great deal of black humour. The plot is not developed with a clear and defined purpose and there is not a climax point, so the most important topic of the film is the descriptive element of the society. Maybe, the reason for that is the child guidance of the film.

As we have said, *Oliver Twist* represents the social conditions of life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We can see a hungry Oliver running away from the house where he worked as apprentice due to the ill-treatment received by his stepfathers. The orphanage is a place where children live together with rats and fleas in unhealthy conditions. All the children are starving and they are forced to work as slaves. According to that statement, it is worth pointing out the working conditions children were submitted to. The film shows that children, due to their small size, were used as chimney sweepers. As a consequence of this practice many children died suffocated or burnt caught in the flames.

Regarding the diet, the “British Medical Journal” published an article where experts of the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics of the hospital of Northampton analyzed the diet followed in the orphanages of the Victorian England. The conclusion of the experts was that the diet was not the appropriate one for the correct growth of a child. As a consequence of an irregular diet children had a tendency to suffer certain diseases related to malnutrition, such as anemia or rickets. According to *Oliver Twist* in the novel of Charles Dickens, his diet consisted in “three small portions of porridges daily, an onion two times a week and a small roll at Sundays. At holidays we received 60 extra grams of black bread”. Curiously, further studies show that orphanages received large quantities of meet for guests.

In general terms, the diet of workers was based on cereals and dairy products. A poor diet on minerals contributed to the demineralization of the skeleton, physical weakness and, finally, premature death. The working habits of workers were based on the repetition of the same patterns in a low-intensity but long-term. They did not have rest time. All of these factors contributed to the apparition of the previously mentioned diseases.

### **6.2.3 MARRIAGE**

The convulse period of the Industrial Revolution made marriage and social relations changed the concept of traditional families due to the social difficulties and hard working conditions that affect, consequently, family relationships. There was a decline in family affection which was substituted by functional, even brutalized, relationships between the members of the family (Stone, 1979: p. 419).

Marriage is an unknown matter of which there are neither data nor documents to prove the social relationships in 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is known that the majority of workers got married between the age of 25 and 30, the moment when men enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. The men chose their partner when they were independent of their parents. Also, it is a reality that workers made their own decision in a limited variety of possibilities because social life was reduced and society moved in a closed circle. For example, if you belong to the upper-class you would be in contact with people of the same upper-class, but if you are a worker and, in conclusion, a poor man, your aspirations would be very limited. Indeed, there were many women who went out to serve in other houses as maids and maintained contact with the suitors of their home town with whom later on they got married.

Another important fact that affected marriage was pregnancy. It is a relevant aspect due to the elevated number of pregnant women before marriage at that time. The reason for this affirmation is that many girls tried to be pregnant in order to assure the company and, especially, sustenance of a man. Related to this aspect is bastardy. Illegitimacy gave bad

reputation to women and it was poorly considered. Women have to say the name of the father in order to avoid social punishment (Rule, 1990: p. 285).

Finally, prostitution was another widespread phenomenon at that time. There was not information about prostitution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and what is known is related to the slums of big cities, linked to misery. However, industrialized cities like Manchester and Liverpool had less influence by comparison with other non industrialized cities due to work opportunities. Women had the opportunity to work in factories and this fact was crucial to diminish the number of prostitutes. Nevertheless, prostitution was a provisional work for women who looked for better opportunities in this convulse period of history.

Marriage and social relations are two represented themes in *Oliver Twist*. For instance, we can see how Oliver is mistreated by Noah Claypole, the daughter of his adoptive parents, because his mother was a woman of questioned reputation. Oliver was ridiculed many times by his adoptive parents who consider him an ungrateful child for his ingratitude towards them.

The relation between Bill Sykes and Nancy is the representation of the relation between men and women. The figure of Nancy adapts perfectly to the description of women who need a man as an economical support. As we have seen, several changes resulted in gender roles of women: men were the social class who worked and brought money into the house whereas the women participated in domestic production, such as spinning and weaving. This couple is the perfect example of a decline and brutalized family. As we have seen, Bill Sykes scorns Nancy constantly and finally, in a fit of rage, murders her.

Personally, we consider social relations were involved in a process of deterioration due to the hard working and living conditions that favored a change in the social structure. Women, men, even children were absorbed by factory working and there was not much time to enjoy their spare time. This reason together with the low wages and a corrupted



environment consequence of the industrialization, contributed to the functional nature of the social relationships.

#### **6.2.4 EDUCATION**

“The expansion of public education and industrialization were hand in hand” using Jim Carl words on the book *International Handbook of Comparative Education* (2009: p. 506). Before the Industrial age, there was a scarce number of schools and it depended on tuition, fees, and usually limited to males. In feudal Europe, education belonged to the church and few people could finance the required expenses to attend school. As Carl says, “Schooling was also largely irrelevant for entrepreneurs, capitalists, and managers of the early factories of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They considered the skills acquired through apprenticeships and technologies honed through trial and error, were the requirements, not skills and credentials acquired in school” according to the mentioned author (2009: p. 506). Carl also says that even the skilled craftsmen were virtually uneducated.

However, with the growth of industry, there were edicts that supported public education growth and the result was a transformation of schooling from limited provision into widespread and hierarchical educational systems (2009: p. 503). Gains in income and wealth during the Industrial age made possible larger public expenditures for the welfare of the general population, and all governments considered schooling in their management guidelines. Furthermore, as educational access widened, women were also affected by the new normative and their education was more frequent within the social scale.

In the rise of the new educational systems, social cohesion was a central topic to the schooling of children. In that sense, British public education promoted “national unity” and “national success” as new patriotic values. The improvements in the educational system were commanded by political institutions that emitted edicts in favor of schooling. Thus, when we analyze the growth of public education we have to take into account the role of the industrialization as a trigger factor.

Another important factor dealing with the educational system is concerned about “the mismatch between what is learnt in school and the skills required on the future job” (2009: p. 504). This fact cost a reprimand to the British government because although Britain was considered a world power, the Parliament did not include England on a path toward universal primary education until the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Finally, we want to remark two citations from professor Isaac L. Kandel who reflects upon the entering of Great Britain into the modern world: “The more they are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition” and “an instructed and intelligent people, besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one” (2009: p. 503).

Our particular analysis considers education as one of the most important causes for the development and improvement of society. It resulted in the triggered factor for the evolution of the British society in many aspects. This topic is not clearly represented in *Oliver Twist* but we consider it of such magnitude that it was a must. Following, we will provide some reflections to consider education as a key factor for social improvement.

The most evident benefit that educational system introduced in the Industrial Revolution was the literacy of all of the children. It was an education based on printed books instead of the oral teaching from earlier times. As we have seen before, the Industrial Revolution introduced the mass production system and institutions were created to teach the techniques and methods for the new financial characteristics. Moreover, education was needed not just for the new financial system, but also for the common good of the country. England was an economic power and it should be at the forefront in all the aspects.

Finally, the government created a squad of professionals that evaluated the students through exams. Also, there were implemented scientific and philosophical basics that provided the conceptual and methodological bases. It became the birth of the new

educational paradigm and it had repercussion in the rest of education systems. (*El progreso a través de la revolución industrial*, online webpage).

## 7. CONCLUSION

The Industrial Revolution can be defined as the trigger movement that allowed British society the entrance in the contemporary world. This was a period of profound changes that affected the lower classes directly. The stance of the majority of the writers investigated takes a negative attitude against the procedures and subsequent conclusions of the industrial movement.

Currently, audiovisual media are present in all social areas and continue increasing its importance. Cinema has the capacity to transmit emotions through the image of its characters. It has the faculty to make the audience perceive and focus on a particular movement, tendency, or community. The audience can easily identify itself with the protagonist, learn from the characters, or know many historical and cultural aspects: cinema can be used as a learning tool. In this sense, there are many highlighted aspects in *Oliver Twist* that makes the spectator think about it: lack of education, abandon and child mistreatment, widespread vandalism, development of capitalism, migratory movements, and apparition of machinism.

Cinema and, in particular, *Oliver Twist*, gives visibility to these changes focusing on the transformation process of Oliver, an orphan child who abandons the rural area and enters in a hostile London that takes him in. Upon arrival and after being involuntarily recruited as a thief, Oliver loses many illusions, although his honesty remains intact. From the human point of view, *Oliver Twist* becomes a fantastic device to show and transmit the suffering of the child who represents the whole working class. *Oliver Twist* is focused on a precise moment in history and reflects the reality of those years, but there are many aspects which escape from this little capture in time, such as the improvements in health and education, in human rights and the status of women.

Cinema offers the possibility to study history under different lights, depending on the intention of the film. *Oliver Twist* makes use of an emotional tone in order to emphasize how children were treated in the London of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This tone is used to create a strong sense of empathy between Oliver and the audience. The film is based on an emotional environment arising sympathy, even pity, about the innocent child. This is the medium to show the abandonment of orphan children and the lack of social consciousness that make the audience take a stance against the child exploitation suffered at that time. The set of pictures at the appendix are used to demonstrate that the abuse and child mistreatment was a real topic in the Industrial Revolution and not a simple cinematographic creation.

In conclusion, *Oliver Twist*, basing its plot in a historic event, represents the emotional shock that Oliver, the whole working class, suffered in his arrival to the big city. The illusions, expectations, and future projects were frustrated facing the precarious conditions that industrialized London offered. Finally, our personal conclusion about this topic is that the working class could adopt two attitudes: to resign oneself and continue being subjected to capitalist measures, or to rebel and face up to this tyranny. From a theoretical point of view, the proletariat realized these injustices and decided to take action.

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## 9. APPENDIX

### 9.1 APPENDIX I. GROWTH OF LONDON IN THE 18<sup>TH</sup> AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

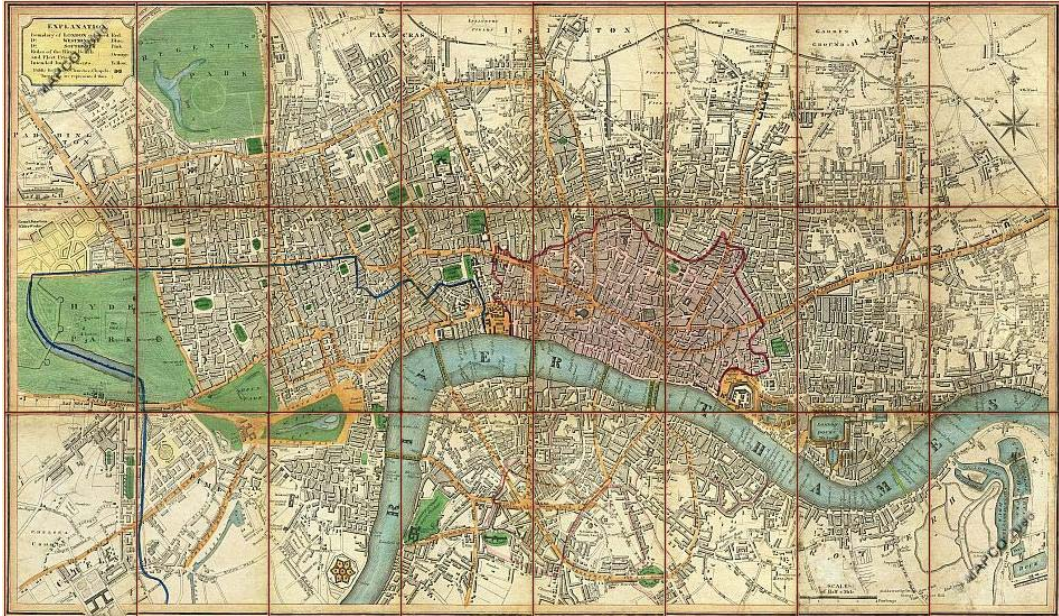


London at 1730



London at 1800



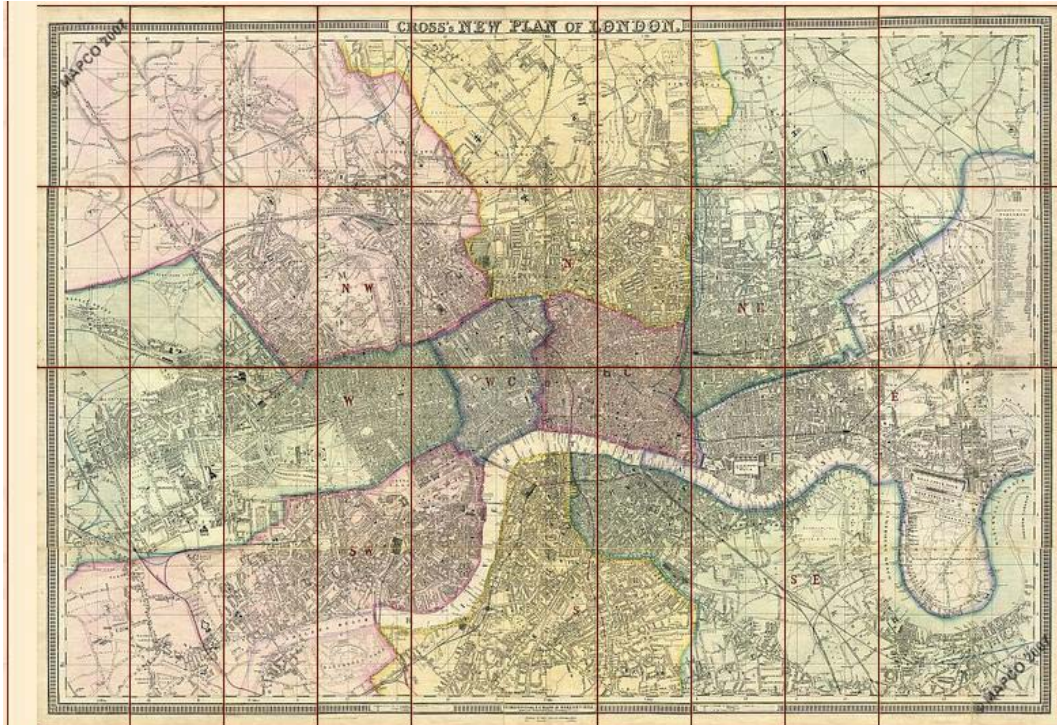


London at 1830



London at 1850





London at 1860

Year	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
<b>Inner London</b>	879,491	▲ 1,040,033	▲ 1,263,975	▲ 1,515,557	▲ 1,661,346	▲ 1,995,846	▲ 2,634,143	▲ 3,272,441	▲ 3,910,735	▲ 4,422,340
<b>Outer London</b>	131,666	▲ 157,640	▲ 186,147	▲ 214,392	▲ 255,667	▲ 290,763	▲ 460,248	▲ 629,737	▲ 799,225	▲ 1,143,516
<b>Greater London</b>	1,011,157	▲ 1,197,673	▲ 1,450,122	▲ 1,729,949	▲ 1,917,013	▲ 2,286,609	▲ 3,094,391	▲ 3,902,178	▲ 4,709,960	▲ 5,565,856

Year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
<b>Inner London</b>	▲ 4,670,177	▲ 4,997,741	▼ 4,936,803	▼ 4,887,932	▼ 4,224,135	▼ 3,680,821	▼ 3,336,557	▼ 3,030,490	▼ 2,425,534	▲ 2,625,245
<b>Outer London</b>	▲ 1,556,317	▲ 2,160,134	▲ 2,616,723	▲ 3,211,010	▲ 3,763,801	▲ 4,483,595	▼ 4,444,785	▼ 4,418,694	▼ 4,182,979	▲ 4,262,035
<b>Greater London</b>	▲ 6,226,494	▲ 7,157,875	▲ 7,553,526	▲ 8,098,942	▼ 7,987,936	▲ 8,164,416	▼ 7,781,342	▼ 7,449,184	▼ 6,608,513	▲ 6,887,280

Demographic evolution of London in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**9.2 APPENDIX II. LEWIS HINE'S PHOTOGRAPHS ABOUT THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION  
AND CHILD LABORERS**













