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The Portrayal of the Working Class's Suffering during the Industrial Revolution in Blake's the Chimney Sweeper a Marxist Analysis

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Abstract. This study examines William Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweeper" from a Marxist perspective, focusing on the portrayal of the working class's suffering during the Industrial Revolution. The research employs Marxist criticism as its methodology, while also utilizing figurative language analysis, including symbols, metaphors, irony, and hyperbole, to delve into the poem's meaning. By applying Marxist class theory, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that perpetuated the suffering of the proletariat during this historical period. The findings indicate that figurative language, such as symbols, metaphors, irony, and hyperbole, effectively depict the working class's hardships during the Industrial Revolution. The poem employs the symbol of an "Angel" to represent the religious institution's complicity in suppressing the working class. Metaphors are employed to illustrate the perilous working conditions experienced by the proletariat. Irony is used to highlight the mistreatment and dismissive attitudes towards the working class. Hyperbole is utilized to emphasize the chimney sweepers' jubilation upon their liberation by an Angel. Furthermore, the study reveals that several factors contributed to the working class remaining in a state of oppression during the Industrial Revolution, including government support for the upper class, class divisions, and propaganda.

Keywords: Marxist, Industrial Revolution, working class, upper class, suffering.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study: The Industrial Revolution, although responsible for progress in British society during the 18th and 19th centuries, also brought about poverty. This period marked a significant transformation in British daily life, characterized by technological advancements, the shift from hand production to machines, economic growth, and societal changes. However, it also resulted in increased trade, the migration of rural populations to cities, and long working hours for individuals seeking to earn a living. During the Industrial Revolution, both adults and children from poor families were compelled to work in factories under hazardous conditions. Factory owners preferred employing children due to their lower wages, saving on labor costs. Children were also easier to control and punish, and their small size allowed them to work in confined spaces. Tragically, many families were unable to provide food for their children, leading to cases where children were sold into apprenticeships. Orphaned or neglected children whose parents were unable to support the household were often sold willingly to reduce expenses and avoid starvation. "The Chimney Sweeper," a poem written by William Blake, tells the tale of a child who was sold into chimney sweeping labor by his father after his mother's death. Chimney sweeping was one of the prevalent and egregious abuses suffered by children in Great Britain during the Industrial Revolution. This research examines how Blake, from a Marxist perspective, portrays the economic hardships faced by the working class in "The Chimney Sweeper." It highlights the exploitation and social injustice endured by the working class during the Industrial Revolution, particularly through the involvement of children in labor. Marxism recognizes only two social classes: the bourgeoisie and the working class.

Statement of the Problem: Many students in the English Department face challenges when it comes to interpreting and analyzing poems, particularly those written in the past. One such poem is "The Chimney Sweeper" by William Blake, originally published in two parts: "Songs of Innocence" in 1789 and "Songs of Experience" in 1794. This poem has garnered significant attention from researchers due to its literary significance. It serves as a reflection of working-class life and the severe economic hardships endured under the

influence of capitalism. Kurdish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) university students need to read and comprehend the meaning of "The Chimney Sweeper" because it addresses the dark history of child labor, which is still prevalent in the Kurdistan Region.

Research Questions:

RQ1.How does the poem "The Chimney Sweeper" portrays the working class and their experiences of suffering and sorrow during the Industrial Revolution?

RQ2.To what extent did the Industrial Revolution contribute to the hardships endured by the working class?

Significance of the Study: This study holds significance in several ways. By employing Marxist critical theory to analyze William Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweeper," it provides students with an opportunity to comprehend the political, economic, and social transformations that took place during the Industrial Revolution. More importantly, it offers a deeper understanding of the suffering experienced by the proletariat and the message that Blake intends to convey through his work. This research can serve as a valuable contribution to the English Department, providing a reference for students studying the same topic and assisting them in their studies.

Aim of the Study: The aim of this study is to examine and interpret William Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweeper" from the perspective of Marxist criticism. By doing so, it seeks to enhance our understanding of the profound impact of capitalism and the radical changes that occurred in all aspects of life during the Industrial Revolution.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Marxist Literary Criticism: Marxist literary criticism, founded by Karl Marx (1818-1883), examines literature through the lens of Marxist ideology. Marx, a German philosopher, economist, and revolutionary, critiqued the injustices within the European class system and the capitalist economy of the 19th century. According to Marxism, history is characterized by a struggle between oppressed and oppressive classes, with class conflict playing a central role. In the realm of literary criticism, Marxism views literature as a reflection of society. It recognizes that literary works have an explicit ideological function and are influenced by the social, cultural, historical, and political context in which they are produced. Marxist thought, developed through Marx's collaboration with Engels, delved into topics such as socialist movements, class conflicts, and capitalism. It critically examines capitalist institutions and principles, exerting a significant influence on literary criticism in the 20th century. According to Marxist literary criticism, understanding a literary work entails paying attention to its forms, styles, and meanings, as well as their historical underpinnings. It is not solely concerned with the sociology of literature or the mere representation of the working class in novels. (Al-DawoodyAbdulaal 2022) Rather, it recognizes that these forms, styles, and meanings are products of a specific historical context. The environment in which a writer lives and the historical factors that shape them are pivotal in producing literary works. The key objective of Marxist literary criticism is to analyze the dominant political tendencies within literary works and determine the extent to which their social content, forms, styles, structures, and tones have developed. It emphasizes the examination of class stratification, class conflict, oppression, and the political background of texts. A central tenet of Marxist criticism is to focus on the social and political aspects of a work, rather than its aesthetic value. Cohesion is the semantic relationship between elements in a text, allowing sentences to form a cohesive and unified whole. It goes beyond mere grammatical units and encompasses the semantic connections between ideas in spoken or written discourse. Cohesion helps convey and connect ideas in a text, making it a meaningful and coherent piece of language. The interpretation of one element in a cohesive text depends on another, as they presuppose and rely on each other.(Tran Ngoc Huy, D 2022). Cohesion involves the connections that readers establish between ideas in a text, whether explicitly signaled or not. It encompasses both grammatical and lexical aspects. Grammatical cohesion, as categorized by Halliday and Hasan (1976), includes reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. These cohesive devices serve as signals to guide readers in making connections with previous or forthcoming information. On the other hand, lexical cohesion encompasses reiteration and collocation, focusing on the cohesion achieved through vocabulary choices. Cohesion is not limited to grammar but also encompasses vocabulary. It is crucial for creating ties and connections within a text, aiding readers in understanding and interpreting the relationships between ideas. Cohesive devices act as markers or signals that facilitate the comprehension and construction of meaning in written discourse.

Relevant Studies: Several studies have been conducted on William Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweeper." Wardani (2014) conducted a study titled "The Analysis of William Blake's poem The Chimney Sweeper" using a biographical approach. The study revealed that the poem depicts chimney sweeping as a dangerous and horrific business, neglecting the sanitation and health of children, and highlighting the potential health hazards of chimney soot. Manibo (2018) conducted a study titled "New Perspectives on Paul and Marx: William Blake's The Chimney Sweeper" using the Marxist approach. The study argued that the poem criticizes religion and sees the real antagonists as the powers of death, rather than the individuals who perpetuate the exploitation of chimney sweeper boys. Kurnianto (2019) conducted a study titled "Child Exploitation in William Blake's The

Chimney Sweeper" using the sociology of literature approach. The study examined the reflection of child labor in the poem, prevalent in England during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The study proposed possible solutions for freeing the chimney sweepers, including physical liberation and spiritual or religious transformation. Mahardikengrat (2021) conducted a study titled "The Hardship of the Proletariat during the Industrial Revolution in William Blake's The Chimney Sweeper" using the Marxist approach. The study analyzed the poem and revealed the portrayal of the working class's hardships through metaphorical speeches such as symbols, metaphors, irony, and hyperbole. The study highlighted the involvement of religious institutions in subduing the working class, described the unsafe working conditions of the lower class, and emphasized the unbalanced and inappropriate treatment of the working class. The study also discussed the imagery of celebration upon the liberation of the chimney sweepers by an angel.

3. METHODOLOGY

The Approach of the Study: The approach utilized in this study is Marxist criticism, which serves as the primary methodological framework. Marxist criticism examines literary works through the lens of social class and the dominant ideologies of that class, recognizing that authors are shaped by their social context and that their writings reflect this context (Barry, 2009). By adopting a Marxist perspective, this study aims to explore how "The Chimney Sweeper" by William Blake portrays the suffering and sorrow of the working class during the Industrial Revolution. Marxist criticism provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the socio-economic conditions and power dynamics depicted in the poem.

Data Collection: The data collection process involves gathering information from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source for this study is the poem "The Chimney Sweeper" written by William Blake. The researcher carefully reads and analyzes the poem to identify key themes, literary devices, and the overall message conveyed. The primary source serves as the foundation for the analysis, enabling a close examination of Blake's portrayal of the working class's suffering. Secondary sources play a vital role in supporting the analysis and providing additional insights. These sources include books, e-books, websites, and scholarly articles that discuss figurative language, Marxist concepts, and the social conditions of the Industrial Revolution. The researcher conducts a thorough literature review to identify relevant secondary sources that contribute to the understanding of the poem and its socio-political context. The data collection process follows a systematic approach. It begins with a careful reading of the poem to establish a solid understanding of its content. Next, the research questions are formulated to guide the analysis and investigation. The researcher then explores the secondary sources to gather information that sheds light on the poem's themes, symbolism, and socio-economic implications. By combining the primary and secondary sources, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of "The Chimney Sweeper" within the framework of Marxist criticism.

Analysis: This section presents the breakdown of the study. The analysis comprises three sections. The first section involves the explication of the poem "The Chimney Sweeper," which narrates the story of children who suffer from working in the chimney sweep labor. The speaker begins by sharing their miserable childhood story, explaining that their mother passed away when they were young. Surprisingly, their father sold them while they were still unable to speak clearly, resulting in their orphan status. As a working-class orphan, they were compelled to work in the chimney sweep business to make a living. The speaker emphasizes their young age and inability to pronounce "sweep" clearly, resorting to "weep" instead. They had to abandon their innocent childhood moments and begin working in a filthy workplace.

"When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry 'weep! weep! weep! weep!'
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep."
(Blake, stanza 1, lines 1-4)

The speaker then narrates the story of their friend, Tom Dacre, who also works in the chimney sweep business. Tom cries when his hair is shaved off. The speaker, witnessing this scene, becomes sad and approaches Tom to offer a few words of consolation. The speaker claims that shaving off Tom's hair is not a big problem anymore since his head is now bare and the dirt cannot damage his hair. The speaker indirectly suggests that losing a valuable thing like hair is insignificant compared to the work they have to do. Children work better and produce better output when they aren't dressed up. The chimney sweep business violates children's rights, as they should be playing and studying instead of working in such hazardous conditions. Children were the perfect size for chimney sweeping, and the factory owners paid them very low wages compared to adults.

"There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,
'Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.'"
(Blake, stanza 2, lines 5-8)

The speaker mentions Tom's dream once again. One silent night, Tom has a dream where he sees thousands of sweepers locked up in black coffins. The children realize they are being exploited by the rich. The black coffins symbolize the chimney sweepers' workplace, which is typically dark and dirty. The children feel confined and trapped in their work environment, which likely leads to deformity and death due to the unsafe conditions.

"And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight,
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;"
(Blake, stanza 3, lines 9-12)

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question regarding the depiction of the working class's sufferings and sorrow during the Industrial Revolution through figurative language, the analysis should focus on intrinsic elements. The answer will be divided into four sections, each exploring a specific type of figurative language.

Symbol: To address the first research question on how the sufferings and sorrow of the working class during the Industrial Revolution are depicted through figurative language, the analysis focuses on intrinsic elements and

their use of figurative language. This answer is divided into four sections, each examining a specific type of figurative language. In the context of the poem, symbols play a crucial role in conveying deeper meaning. For instance, the symbol of the "Angel" is repeated in the 4th and 5th stanzas, representing the involvement of religious institutions. The capitalization of the word emphasizes its significance. In the 4th stanza, the Angel is portrayed as a savior, freeing the children from their laborious existence. This symbolizes the dire conditions experienced by the working class during the Industrial Revolution, where religious institutions seemed to be the only ones concerned about their plight. However, from a Marxist perspective, religion is seen as a construct created by individuals to seek solace and distract from their harsh reality (Blau, 2015). It is considered a false form of happiness that fails to address the material conditions of the working class. The symbol of the Angel reappears in the 5th stanza, but its role shifts. Here, the Angel serves as a guide and supervisor, advising the children to be "good boys" in order to gain real joy. This implies obedience to their employers and the acceptance of their subservient position. The vertical relationship between the factory owners and the working class mirrors that between God and humans. The employer is regarded as a godlike figure who provides livelihoods, and obedience is directly linked to rewards. The religious institution, in this context, propagates the idea of submission and discourages resistance among the working class. According to Marxism, religious institutions employ propaganda to suppress class consciousness and discourage the working class from challenging the capitalist system (Chappelow, 2019). Religious teachings often promise rewards in the afterlife, diverting attention from the immediate material struggles faced by the working class. However, Marxism asserts that true liberation can only be achieved through a classless society that upholds shared ownership and equal opportunities (Barry, 2009). In summary, the use of symbols, particularly the "Angel," in the poem reflects the involvement of religious institutions in addressing the sufferings of the working class. While religion is portrayed as a source of hope and solace, Marxist analysis views it as a form of false happiness that perpetuates the existing power dynamics and suppresses the working class's struggle for genuine liberation.

Metaphor: In the third stanza, the metaphor of "coffins of black" is used to describe the chimneys where the working class is trapped. This metaphor signifies death and hopelessness, highlighting the hazardous working conditions and lack of choices for the poor. The working class is seen as mere possessions in the capitalist system, with their well-being disregarded for the sake of profit. This interpretation aligns with previous research that emphasizes the dangerous nature of chimney sweeping and the disregard for the health of the working class. The upper class prioritizes their own profits over the welfare of the workers.

Irony: In "The Chimney Sweepers" poem, three instances of irony can be observed. Firstly, the narrator's claim of sleeping in soot is ironic since it contradicts the expectation of a better life for the working class. Secondly, the false consolation given to Tom about his shaved head reveals the deceptive nature of the capitalist system, where the children's well-being is sacrificed for productivity. Lastly, the statement that working hard eliminates the fear of harm is ironic because the working class actually suffers from unsafe conditions and exploitation. These ironies expose the harsh reality and dehumanization experienced by the working class during the Industrial Revolution, as they are treated as mere possessions of the capitalist system [24].

Hyperbole: Hyperbole, an exaggerated statement, can be identified in "The Chimney Sweepers" poem. The release of the chimney sweepers by an angel is portrayed as a grand celebration, with the children leaping, laughing, running, washing in a river, and shining in the sun. This hyperbolic depiction emphasizes the suffering and exploitation of the working class. Similarly, in another stanza, the chimney sweepers rising on clouds and playing in the wind symbolize their freedom and joy. These hyperboles serve to highlight the contrast between the harsh reality of the working class and their longing for liberation and happiness. Ultimately, the poem suggests that heavenly promises become their only source of comfort in the absence of worldly contentment.

The Industrial Revolution as a factor leading the working class suffer: The Industrial Revolution played a significant role in causing the suffering of the working class. The power of the capitalists, backed by the government, allowed them to exploit the working class through laws and private property rights. The working class was treated as property and used to maximize the bourgeoisie's profits. The class division further perpetuated the suffering, as the working class had limited job opportunities and dangerous working conditions. Propaganda, including religious manipulation, also played a part in subduing the working class and preventing resistance. The promise of heavenly rewards was used to suppress their discontent and justify their hardships. Overall, the combination of capitalist power, class division, and propaganda contributed to the working class's suffering during the Industrial Revolution.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, "The Chimney Sweeper" poem serves as a powerful depiction of the hardships faced by the working class, particularly the children, during the industrial revolution. Through the skilled use of figurative language, including symbolism, metaphor, irony, and hyperbole, the poem effectively conveys the suffering and loss experienced by these individuals. The symbols of the angel represent both hope and the influence of religious institutions, offering a glimmer of salvation amidst the harsh realities. Metaphors such as "coffins of black" paint a vivid picture of the dangerous and desperate working conditions that posed risks to the lives of

the chimney sweepers. Irony highlights the mistreatment, false consolation, and fear-driven work ethic imposed upon the working class, exposing the injustices they endured. Hyperbole brings to life the yearning for joy and freedom, contrasting the stark reality with moments of imagined celebration. These figurative language devices allow the reader to empathize with the plight of the working class, and shed light on the factors that perpetuated their suffering. The power of the upper class, supported by the government, maintained control and treated the working class as mere property for profit. Class division further weakened the working class, ensuring their subordination. Propaganda created an illusion of happiness, distracting the working class from the harsh realities they faced and making resistance more difficult. The Chimney Sweeper" serves as a reminder of the social injustices and human costs associated with industrialization. By shedding light on the plight of the working class, it encourages us to reflect upon the consequences of progress and to strive for a more equitable society, where the rights and well-being of all individuals, including the most vulnerable, are protected and valued.

Scope for the further research: Further research on the topic of child labor and the working conditions during the industrial revolution can provide valuable insights and expand our understanding of this historical period. Here are some areas that could be explored in future research: Historical context: Investigate the broader historical, economic, and social factors that contributed to the rise of child labor during the industrial revolution. Explore the specific policies, laws, and economic structures that shaped the working conditions and treatment of child laborers. Regional and international perspectives: Examine the variations in child labor practices and working conditions across different regions and countries during the industrial revolution. Compare the experiences of child laborers in Britain with those in other industrialized nations and explore the impact of globalization on child labor practices. Voices of the marginalized: Focus on the stories and experiences of individual child laborers to understand their perspectives and the specific challenges they faced. Examine primary sources such as personal accounts, diaries, and letters to gain a deeper understanding of the daily lives and struggles of these children. Long-term consequences: Investigate the long-term physical, psychological, and social effects of child labor on individuals and communities. Explore how the experiences of child laborers during the industrial revolution shaped their lives as adults and influenced subsequent generations..

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