

Precariats in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*



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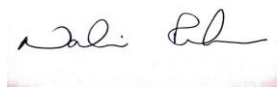
**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
BA in English**

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Spring 2024

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nadia Rahman', is written over a horizontal line.

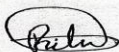
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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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Abstract

The study examines the portrayal of precarity in William Blake's poetry, with a specific focus on themes including precarity, discrimination, racism, instability, and alienation. The analysis explores the socio-economic criticism found in poems such as "The Little Black Boy", "The Chimney Sweeper", "The Little Boy Lost" and "London", and evaluates its significance in contemporary society. The research argues that Blake's poetic depictions provide a profound analysis of the human experience within oppressive socio-economic systems which results in alienation as presented in Marx's "Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844". Additionally, the subsequent weakness can be related to Butler's notion of precarity as discussed in "Precarious Life": The Power of Mourning and Violence." Blake's works explicitly denounce the systematic inequalities that perpetuate social suffering and inequality, while also shedding light on the challenges faced by those who are oppressed. The study seeks to explore the ongoing discussion on vulnerability throughout the various periods, highlighting how Blake's poetic insights can provide significant and valuable perspectives on the vulnerabilities and resilience of individuals amidst social and economic hardships. In doing so, the poems encourage and empower underprivileged individuals to voice their grievances against the injustices they face.

Keywords: Precarity, discrimination, alienation, instability.

Introduction

Precarity refers to the state of uncertainty and vulnerability that individuals experience in their lives, especially in their socio-economic circumstances. The precariat phenomenon can have adverse implications for individuals, communities, families, and relationships, intensifying issues of social inequality, economic instability, and political cynicism consequently resulting in negative societal implications. The human precariats who are vulnerable, often face issues related to economic recessions and unpredictability. The vulnerability and uncertainty of life often result in mental tension and the inability to future planning, and both of these eventually lead to deteriorations in mental and physical health. People belonging to what can be termed as 'human precariat' face substantive challenges in achieving financial stability and security, thus, more often than not, they are forced to tackle financial hardships along with stumbling upon limitations in their upward social mobility. People are more likely to experience financial shocks when the economy is worse, and poverty can get worse due to this. This marginalization is manifested in their legal status which tends to be limited either by inaccessibility to legal resources or legal representation so that it continues to be impossible for them to assert their rights or appropriate action can be taken when abuse takes place. Precariats, like most of the others who are in that category, are weak politically as they are vulnerable to humiliation, negative attitudes, and a loss of purpose.

Precarity is intertwined with economic instability and class struggle which leads to social inequality. Social inequalities correspond to unemployment, inadequate education, social exclusion, sickness, and death. Social precarity means to talk about the instability and tensions in relationships, the position of an individual in society, and the sense of being a member of society. As a result, this vulnerability makes these people susceptible to unequal treatment which

leads to a lack of social harmony and opportunities. Consequently, one of the main concerns of poets such as William Blake is to try to depict the despair and the anxiety that is induced by uncertainty in humans' lives and to explain how that despair affects the attitude of the characters towards other human beings and the world. In his works, much strength is executed to express the complex nature of humanity without making judgments promoting understanding and social change. He portrays the proletariat class through the young chimney sweepers, the slaves- who are all victims of imperialism and socially marginalized and consequently lose their stability, sometimes even fall into poverty, have to flee or get exploited because of socioeconomic difficulties that eventually become part of their history - the historical materialism. The ever-expanding bourgeoisie class, which controlled the production and became increasingly wealthy, relegated the workers to slums, and poor health, creating the need for child labor as seen in Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper" from "Songs of Innocence". This poem highlights the exploitation of child laborers who are made to work for extended hours under extreme conditions which ultimately reflects the growing income inequality. In a capitalist system, one ends up not only disconnected from the output of his or her work as depicted in Blake's "London" but also any creative ability the heart holds, mirroring Blake's lamentation of the "mind-forg'd manacles" ("London", line 8). The feeling of alienation in the story of the characters of Blake is also aggravated by the fact of uncertain employment as the factor of employers who misuse and degrade the workers which leads to the further feeling of detachment from life when the workers are missing a content atmosphere to belong.

Vulnerability imposes the selling of different facets of a person along lines of the process of creation of salary, time to work, and even the essential commodity of life as portrayed by the weary figures, where every face shows "marks of weakness, marks of woe" ("London" line 4).

This specific poem depicts the downsides of an economic downturn are usually incurred by the already marginalized groups that do not easily get access to the resources that could mitigate their hardships.

Romanticism characterizes the emphasis on individual merits and personal emotions. Usually, the writer/the artist addresses the questions related to human life, because it is often difficult and unpredictable. Blake's poetry from the Romantic period portrays characters struggling not only with their day-to-day problems but also their position in the then society and politics, which was a lot like the reality of uncertainty and rawness of 18th and 19th century England. The Romantic period discourse, in which poets like William Blake are relevant, gives attention to social and political disruption, the unpredictable, and the problems that the community gets exposed to. William Blake in his compositions including "Songs of Innocence and Experience" shrewdly presents how thoroughly the nature of childhood predominated over the hardened truths of youth; giving insights into such themes of decay of society and fragility. In poems like "The Chimney Sweeper" and "London," the vision of the harsh world where people get abused, enslaved, and tortured due to poor living conditions and high social inequality becomes conspicuous. These poems critique the social decay and the loss of innocence, representative of the broader romantic critique of the industrial society that has immensely impacted human values. Poems like "London" and "The Little Black Boy" where society is looked at through cynical eyes, unveil human poor dignity and restricted freedom pushed by various uncompromising social norms and institutions. The idea of the agenda is also on the discrimination and the unsteady state of living faced by the black people in society, with an emphasis on the structural barriers preventing their equality and advancing their welfare. The introspective poetry by Blake serves as a timeless examination and shows the social fragility and

unpredictability of the human condition in the romantic time, graciously pointing to the unchanging importance of awe and an inner self.

William Blake, a famous romantic poet has taken too many multifaceted topics in his writings into account such as biblical methods, philosophical beginnings, politics, societal issues and others as well. Scholars tend to probe into the fundamental creative nature and artistic imagery and symbols apparatuses used by Blake to achieve that, and how it enhances the nature of his work. In addition, the critics identify that what is being examined by Blake is the man-God relationship and man's struggle between good and evil. It is not common to find themes of politics or the social problems that matter during his time in the artists' paintings; therefore, the researchers often explore these concepts. While the themes of Blake's ideas are continuously echoed in contemporary literature and culture, there is still a prominent gap in how he explores, articulates, and addresses precarity within his works.

The research seeks to explore how William Blake depicts the precarity of human existence within the socio-political discourse of his time. It aims to examine several aspects of the precarious characters portrayed in Blake's poems to analyze the economic disparity, social injustice, and the loss of innocence in the romantic period. The study also seeks to identify Blake's examination of precarity in the context of Romantic literature and socio-political discourse, highlighting the significance of his work about modern interpretations of vulnerability and opposition. Hence, the research questions are

1. How does William Blake's poetry reflect and critique systems of discrimination, oppression, and injustices of his time?
2. How does Blake's poetry represent the precarity of human emotions?

The research will be conducted qualitatively and the data from published secondary research papers will be used to gain a deeper understanding of historical and textual analysis. In addition, the paper will use Marx's discussion of the distribution of means of production to analyze the class struggle of the vulnerable members represented in Blake's poems. Additionally, Judith Butler's definition of precarity is used to explore whether Blake's characters are more vulnerable to unstable circumstances as a result of the unequal distribution of power within the system. This unambiguously shows a significant resemblance to Blake's portrayal of vulnerable children, ethnic minorities, and the impoverished living conditions in the urban regions.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

William Blake's poems "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience" address issues of social, racial, and economic inequality as well as alienation. This research aims to examine the factors contributing to economic instability, discrimination, and racial segregation, as well as the reasons why the oppressed are unable to resist these issues. Previous studies have shown the historical oppression and unfair treatment of the working class, with secondary sources demonstrating the impact of industrialization, exploitation, and capitalism. The literature review summarizes the essential and significant information on the topic. The reviews are structured chronologically to enhance organization and facilitate comprehension of the core idea. Previous study in this field explores related topics such as oppression, capitalism, and prejudice, offering valuable insights and information that will be examined in this chapter.

Blake's poems can be read as representatives of the exploitation and vulnerability experienced by minorities. Changjuan Zhan provides insights into Blake's relevance as a critique of social injustice and political oppression. The article reflects on the wretched living conditions of the time poems like "London" were written. She emphasizes Blake's criticism of the prevalent social order where "everything was covered with darkness, terrors and miseries" (Zhan 1612) and explores his portrayal of urban suffering and oppression. Specifically, the poem "London" often served as a "social commentator" (Zhan 1612) that talks about the commoditization and commodification of urban spaces. She delves into Blake's depiction of the horror of poverty and despair that acts as overarching hegemonic forces that subjugate minorities. The poem strongly represents the "pain and the injustices done to them and exposes the gap between those in power

and the misery of poor people” (Zhan 1612). She concluded that Blake’s poem can be read as a social and political protest which is against the hegemonic forces that were prevalent at that time.

Blake had a deeper understanding of the terror that was occurring during the 18th century. The vulnerable citizens were shackled to an unpleasant life. His poetry often reflects the oppression and vulnerability experienced by minority communities. Mevlüde Zengin provides an analysis of William Blake's poetry "London" focusing on historical context. In her paper, she claims that his poem serves as “a broad critique of inherited religion, philosophy, artistic production, and society” (124). The poem portrays the “worst-case scenario” (126) of the Londoners. The author explains the appalling living conditions that people are forced to undergo due to industrialization which “changed the city for the worse” (127). The poor people had to work for long hours in unsafe and unhealthy conditions and their hard labor did not guarantee a living wage. The article focuses on the oppression, exploitation, and injustices faced by individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, aligning with these themes.

Blake’s poetry serves as a poignant symbol of the human cost of capitalism and industrialization. His works often highlight the dehumanizing effects of economic systems that prioritize profit over the well-being of the people, specifically the most vulnerable members of society. The suffering of Blake's chimney sweepers, Londoners reflects the harsh reality of capitalism where vulnerable people were exploited for cheap labor in extremely dangerous working conditions. Blake possessed a greater awareness of the widespread dread that pervades the world and the increasing child exploitation during the 18th century, and he emphasized the exploitation of vulnerable individuals. Henry Heller in his book, gives an in-depth analysis regarding the economic forces that were prominent during the period when capitalism emerged, shedding light on the structural inequalities and social injustices inherent in the capitalist system.

Heller uses Marxist lens and explains how “the period of industrial revolution was seen as one of economic instability, poverty and exploitation” (197) to draw attention to the changes in society due to industrialization, which led to capitalism and abuse. During the period of industrialization there was a “deterioration in the quality of life” (198). Heller has critically examined the horrific impact of industrialization in his paper.

Similarly, Jane Humphries’s article explores the harsh realities faced by innocent children during the period of industrialization and capitalism emphasizing particularly labor exploitation and its impact on the lives of the people living in Britain. He delves into the economic and social conditions that forced the children to be employed in factories and mines and the consequences that had on their overall well-being. William Blake’s poems often reflect the cruelty faced by the minorities that occurred during the rapid industrialization as Humphries states, “Child Labor, not surprisingly, was to the fore in these pessimistic assessments of the socio-economic effects of industrialization” (397). Humphries’s article gives an insight into the conditions faced by the working class people, and child laborers, including the poverty, exploitation, and oppression portrayed in Blake’s poetry. Humphries’s discussion on reforming child labor laws and improving the conditions for children sheds light on the themes of exploitation, innocence, oppression, and social injustice represented in Blake’s work. William Blake’s exploration of innocence and experience in his works are discussed in Joanne Faulkner’s book. Blake’s writing often delves into the complexities of childhood, memory, and all the societal perceptions and difficulties and thus portrays the nostalgia, vulnerabilities, and struggles in his literary works. Faulkner analyzes how Blake’s ideas resonate in the modern era by examining parallels between Blake’s themes and contemporary discussion which talks about the virtual subjects shedding light on the complex interplay between technology, memory, society, and the cultural value of

innocence. Blake's work often juxtaposes the purity of innocence with the complexities of human existence and societal norms. His works often "illustrate the impacts upon humanity of early capitalist industrial society" and how the innocent children's are prone to "dangers" (132) due to the rapid industrialization. She talks about how innocent children need to be protected as there are a lot of abusive parents, poverty, materialism, and sexualized pop culture, due to which childhood innocence is a source of worry as the innocence is "thought to be lost to adulthood"(131). The author closely examines how innocent childhood is connected with cultural memory. This research explores how vulnerable the children were during the period of capitalism and how Blake has used his characters to portray the "dangers to humanity of labor relations" (132).

William Blake often expresses sympathy towards minorities and depicts racial prejudice and oppression in unsparing ways. In the 18th century discrimination in the form of hierarchy, racism, and slavery was apparent. Blake was rigorously against the hierarchy. Blake's poem can be read as a social and political protest which is against the hegemonic forces that were prevalent at that time. Mohsen Zohrab Baisy and Bahman Zarriniooe provide an in-depth analysis of how Blake's poem reflects the theme of post-pastoralism and the loss of innocence and offers new insights into the complexities of human-nature relationships. They explore how "the exploitation of the planet is of the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities" (36). Their article explores how Blake's poems depict a world where innocence is lost due to societal corruption and moral decay. The main argument is explored through Giffordian's Post-pastoral theory which offers a critical analysis of the conventional pastoral genre that romanticizes nature as a realm of purity. Instead, it focuses on environmental deterioration and the influence of humans on nature, as well as the consequences of these actions and how "the age of machinery

transforms men into objects” (36). Similarly, the article written by Ali Gunes analyzes William Blake’s “The Little Black Boy” for its anti-racist stance as well as its critiques of the oppression and discrimination that people of color experience due to their race. Blake’s poem subverts the traditional racial hierarchies and advocates for a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of humanity. He often critiques the social norms that were prevailing in his time and promotes empathy and solidarity among individuals regardless of racial indifference. Blake’s portrayal of the little boy and his relationship with the white English child emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity beyond racial boundaries. To dismantle the dichotomy and the prejudices that are linked with Europeans, Gunes makes use of the theory of deconstruction to analyze and challenge the racial dichotomy presented in the poem and questions the underlying assumptions and power dynamics embedded in it. Gunes tries to highlight how the works of Blake destabilize traditional notions of race and identity and reveal the complexities of these concepts. Black meticulously challenged the Cartesian dichotomy of black and white which oversimplifies the complexities of race and perpetuates harmful stereotypes and prejudices.

Susie Chrismalia Garnida and M. Rudi Supsiadi, on the other hand, investigate Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper” and bring attention to the terrible working conditions that were prevalent for children who were engaged in the manufacturing business in Britain during the time of the Industrial Revolution and “received small amount of payment for long work hours” (30). They investigate and illustrate how the children were forced to work in factories. The writers analyze how “the treatment the children received was miserable” (30). The unprivileged children were deceived into completing tedious jobs; they also investigated how these young stars accepted all of the oppression because they felt that God was happy with them regardless of what they were doing. As an additional point of interest, the authors of the article illustrate how

the children who were involved in the Methodism movement served as a source of inspiration for John Wesley's philosophical views who emphasized a methodical approach to spiritual growth. Blake was a critic of the dogma and hierarchy within Methodism and its reliance on established doctrine and organized religions and emphasized more on the direct relationship between an individual and spiritual matters. Blake's works often explore themes of innocence, experience, the power of imagination to transcend earthly limitation, and the nature of good and evil-all of which reflect Blake's engagement with Methodism and his desire to forge a more personal spiritual path.

William Blake often uses imagination as a vehicle for truth and his literary works often reveal the deeper truths about the human experience. Mustafa Canli's paper delves into how William Blake's works embody the attributes of the English Romantic Movement via its thematic concerns, artistic techniques, and philosophical insights which emphasized imagination, individualism, and emotion over rationality and social constraints. Canli's paper explores how Blake's use of contrasting themes between innocence and experience reflects the romantic notion. Blake's mystical and visionary imagination along with his critique of social and political injustices exemplifies the romantic notion. Canli further describes how due to industrialization and technological advancement "the social conditions were terrible and inhumane" (15) and have negatively affected the lives of ordinary British. He emphasizes how "Songs of Innocence and Experience" and other Blake compositions show Blake's animosity to conventionalism and subjugation of the people. The poems "The Chimney Sweeper," "London," and "The Little Black Boy" by William Blake highlight the dreadful realities of industry, capitalism, poverty, and oppression. The article's views are quite applicable to the research being conducted, which examines the consequences of capitalism and industrialization.

Analogously, Liasna Sebrina, Martina Girsang, and Elita Sembiring explore the socioeconomic, racial, and gender biases that were portrayed in William Blake's works. Their analysis focused on how Blake condemned and spoke out against the mistreatment of those who were members of minority groups. Through the use of his poems, Blake illustrated how the plight of underrepresented people had been brought about by the effects of industrialization and capitalism. They explore in detail how the minorities such as "the black child" "poor child" were compelled to face hardships such as "racial discrimination felt by black children ", and how miserable the lives of the children were (47). They were subjected to excessive labor and were subjected to tyranny and discrimination. Therefore, the paper is extremely relevant to this field of research because the question the research is aiming to answer in research inquiry is about how capitalism oppressed and discriminated against the minority and vulnerable individuals in William Blake's poetry.

Most of the research on Blake's poems analyzed the experience of the working class as a result of industrialization and the unjust treatment they received from the capitalists. This research endeavor aims to raise awareness and provide oppressors the opportunity to express their objection to discriminatory activities.

Chapter-3

Precarity and Class Struggle

Social and economic conditions impact the lives of people and force individuals to commodify several aspects of their existence, including their labor, time, and even essential means of sustenance. Judith Butler focuses on the various aspects of uncertainty and vulnerability in an individual's life due to social, economic, and political factors and as a result, certain populations are exposed to injury, violence, and death whereas "certain lives will be highly protected" (32). Human precariats experience instability which makes them susceptible to economic crises or unforeseen events. Being a precariat can negatively affect individuals, communities, families, and relationships contributing to social inequality, economic instability, and political cynicism. Their marginalized position affects their legal rights, and restricts access to legal resources or representation, hindering their ability to defend their rights or seek redress for abuses. Butler explores how systems of power contribute to and perpetuate precarity and believes precariousness is inescapable. The vulnerable members of society often "suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (25).

Due to their economic status precariats frequently face- "poverty, starvation, displacement, and exposure to violence without protection" (Butler 26). As a result, these people lack substantial political control and influence. Butler's commentary represents the marginalization and vulnerability of these individuals. Eventually, this marginalization leads to socioeconomic instability which subsequently diminishes the political power and influence, thereby exerting a negative impact on their social and mental wellbeing. These individuals are

often vulnerable to poverty often face the threat of displacement, and starvation, and are often exposed to violence, abuse, and exploitation, and due to their precarious circumstances they are unable to seek legal protection. Therefore, their lack of access to resources does not provide them with social security, stability, education, and healthcare. Due to their lack of agency, the precariat cannot advocate for themselves in a way that could improve their situations. The disparity in power exacerbates the inequalities. The economic system can be influenced and controlled by powerful forces and individuals who multiply their gains by retaining systems in place that sustain them and reduce the opportunities for minorities. This can result in a separation of wealth into few hands and the opportunities to enjoy the privilege of the few while the majority are kept on the sidelines in the condition of marginalization, which mostly is the way of life of the precariat. So, as a consequence of these power dynamics, the disparity between the rich and poor widens. The poor precariat doesn't influence policymakers and any kind of economic debate with the state while ignoring their needs and rights despite being the most deprived group. However, the increasing gap could be a source of social unrest, whereby an increasing number of people are beginning to develop a feeling of resentment and desperation due to their situation which might destabilize the society. Judith Butler's analysis emphasizes the need for practical solutions to rectify the underlying systemic problems, whether by providing means of economic stability for the precariat, protecting their rights, and combating the marginalization experienced by this class of workers.

Marginalized populations often face financial volatility, and exploitation due to socioeconomic challenges which can be defined as historical materialism. Karl Marx centers on the idea of class struggle as the main force behind all the historical change. He explains that the society is divided into classes based on the relationship to the means of production. The

bourgeoisie who owned the means of production became wealthier, resulting in deplorable working and living conditions, an increase in child labor, long work hours, and excessive income inequality. Eventually, the proletariats were locked in a continuous struggle for resources.

Precarity and class struggle are deeply intertwined as they both explore social and economic structures and how they impact the lives of people. Precarity aggravates the alienation, discrimination, and exploitation experienced by the labor class under the rule of capitalism where there is no security and stability for the proletariat class. Similarly, Marx's idea of class struggle focuses on the conflict between the owners of the means of production and the labor class highlighting the exploitation experienced by the labor class under capitalism. The exploitation eventually leads to economic precarity for the labor class as their works are often undervalued. Butler explores how social norms, power dynamics and politics contribute to the precarity of individuals. She analyzes the idea of how power operates through norms and the social frameworks that dictate who is considered to be feasible in the society and who is not. Certain people are unable to conform to the established societal norms due to their gender, sexuality, race or financial instability and as a result it becomes difficult for those individuals to secure social legitimacy and protections. In her framework, the precariats suffer because the prevailing power structures consider them less valuable which ultimately affects their access to resources, rights, and recognition. According to her, an individual's life is dependent on the societal and political conditions that they have no control over. She also explains how the lives of vulnerable people are not "grievable" because the grief cannot be expressed as those individuals are dehumanized through the neglect of others. Their losses, and their emotions are distant and unnamed and are often not recognized by society. According to Butler, violence is the "touch of

the worst order, a way a primary human vulnerability to another human is exposed in its most terrifying way” (32). So, all these collectively affect marginalized lives.

William Blake, being a poet of the romantic era emphasizes on the interconnected themes of social and political turmoil, instability, and the challenges faced by marginalized groups of the society. Judith Butler’s description of precarity aids in examining several aspects of the precarious characters portrayed in Blake’s poems to analyze the discrimination, alienation, economic disparity, social injustice, and the loss of innocence in the age of industrialization. The themes and settings Blake uses also reflect the injustices people of his time went through. Karl Marx’s definition of “Estranged Labor” (15) helps to gain a better understanding of the underlying issues that led to the class struggle and precariousness of the vulnerable members of society. Marx explains the concept of alienated labor, where the workers become estranged from the products of their work, the workers often do not own the means of production and therefore his labor becomes a commodity. He also explains about how the workers often feel miserable and unhappy and often does not affirm themselves thus this alienation in the act of production often makes labor a torment, a chore. Marx highlights how this impacts human nature under capitalist modes of production, and also mentions how money distorts human and social relationships and turns them into commodities, he critiques the absurdity of the society where wealth accommodates those who produce nothing simply through possession of money.

Chapter-4

Economic Precarity and William Blake's Poetry

William Blake's work effectively examines and critiques the socio-economic instability and vulnerability of the Romantic era. His work provides a poignant portrayal of the precarity faced by the marginalized members of the society and they also serve as an encapsulation of the harsh realities that were prevalent during that period. His poetry provides a narrative of the miserable precariat conditions of the minorities and also critiques the larger socio political institutions that reinforces the precariousness. In his works, he portrays the vulnerabilities of children, racial minorities analogously to Judith Butler's exploration of precarity, where specific populations endure instability due to an unequal power distribution. Taking Butler's discussion of precarity and its connection to vulnerability and power, Blake's children as portrayed in the poems "The Chimney Sweepers", "London" and "The Little Black Boy" highlights the fact that specific groups are more vulnerable to unstable circumstances as a result of unequal distribution of power within the system in urban areas. The scrutiny of precariousness which the poet did in his poems signifies what individuals were prone to in the Romantic age. The industrialization caused shifts from agrarian economics to industrial ones leading to a massive dislocation that gets reflected through the increased child labor. The hardships exacerbated because the wealth generated by industrialization was not evenly distributed and disparity began between the elite class and the impoverished working class. Hence, the time saw a rapid increase in poverty and social inequality. Blake wrote poems that featured strong and credible strokes of the underprivileged section, that bore a reflection on the human condition of the being in that age and a poignant reminder of continuing inequality in our society in the world that we live in today. Hence his works show the dark, grim aspects of the industrial society, highlighting the

mental and physical toll of urban industrial life on the lower class people. The poems reflect the human experience of that class due to the complications made by an oppressive social and economic infrastructure. Blake's character as portrayed in "The Chimney Sweeper," "The Little Black Boy," "London," and "The Little Boy Lost" put the spotlight on the harsh significance of those people who survived during the period of mass transformations, alongside revealing the persistent story about the impacts of the societal inequity and the alienation faced by the poor people.

William Blake depicts the pervasive precarity of the vulnerable members of the society and offers a glimpse into the lives of those who are oppressed and discriminated against. It examines and portrays the horrors of their living conditions. He portrays the harsh reality of child labor in the poem "The Chimney Sweeper," which is included in both "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience." This poem is a direct representation of the precarious economic situation that children are in where the working conditions are dangerous. The poem highlights the hardships of the poor children in the 18th century where the society is structured in a way that the most economically vulnerable are forced to do demeaning jobs. The poet introduces the character of a young chimney sweeper who was sold for giving labor at an age where his "tongue could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'Weep!'" (line 3). This narrative highlights the severe conditions of labor, in which the children's fragility is used for economic gain, which stands in stark contrast to the innocence that is associated with childhood. The children did not have any option, but to work for their survival. They had to work for long hours in dangerous conditions which reflects the harsh realities in a capitalist society that depends on cheap, exploitable labor. The repetition of the word "weep" emphasizes the severity of their condition and how they were forced to climb dirty chimneys in cramped and suffocating conditions at an age they could barely

speak. The fragility of their condition and economic exploitation is further conveyed through the imagery of "coffins of black," (line 12) where the children are digging themselves into an early grave and not living their lives as children should be and it also represents the death of innocence and the brutal toll that physical labor takes on youngsters. The exploitation and economic precarity is further emphasized in the "Songs of Experience" version of "The Chimney Sweeper" where he portrays a more cynical view of the very same profession, revealing the systematic injustice that overlooks the welfare of the children for the economic profit. The lines, "A little black thing among the snow, Crying 'weep! 'Weep! In notes of woe!" (line 2) depicts the suffering of innocent lives and the broader societal indifference to such suffering, emphasizing the inhumane treatment and precarious economic conditions imposed by exploiting the most innocent and vulnerable lives. The poem further highlights the psychological vulnerability the children went through as the child goes on saying, "So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep." (line 4) The soot in which the child sleeps is not metaphorical, but literal, the poor children can never be cleansed of their labor, and had to sleep on the layers of soot. The word "soot" represents the moral corruption of a society that exploits children. The phrase, "I sleep" suggests that the child has accepted the grim reality as an unchangeable part of his life and it also highlights the harsh realities of their lives where their working conditions were not only menacing but also their living conditions dire and there is no sort of safety and security in their lives. Blake critiques the entire social structure that allows and perpetuates such exploitations and precarity and devalues the emotional vulnerability of the oppressed individuals within society.

William Blake further represents the economic precarity in his poem, "London," which creates a vivid image of the economic and social imbalance that exists in the world Blake lived

in. He also captures the precarity of human emotions through a harsh portrayal of urban life of his time. By using evocative language and by using vivid imagery Blake depicts the emotional struggle and injustices faced by the vulnerable people. He observes the "marks of weakness, marks of woe" (line 4) on every face he encounters. The use of the word, "marks" suggests the sorrowful emotions that are engraved into the society, leaving a lasting imprint on its inhabitants. The poem reflects on the precarity that permeates London. The repeated mention of cries points to the suffering of the inhabitants under economic and political oppression. It is important to note that Blake uses the word "charter'd," which implies restricted freedoms granted by a regulating authority, and emphasizes the systemic nature of this inequity. Precariousness is a condition of existence that is experienced by everyone, but it is lived differently depending on the social and economic place of the individual. Blake's portrayal of London's impoverished people draws attention to the fact that precarity is distributed diversely. His approach is consistent with the concept of historical materialism, which holds that the economic foundation of a society affects all other elements of life, hence worsening class struggle and social inequality. Following Marx's idea, on the effects of industrial capitalism, where he mentioned how a worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces and the more his output increases in power and extent, Blake saw this firsthand in London. Blake saw the divide between the expanding prosperity of the industrialists and the worsening conditions of the working class and thus portrayed the precarity in his works.

In Blake's, "The Little Black Boy" he reflects and talks about the economic precarity that is faced by people who are vulnerable in society. By following Butler's idea on "Performativity and Identity Construction" the little boy perceives himself as inferior because of societal norms and prejudices. "My mother taught me underneath a tree," (line 5) this line highlights the

challenges faced by marginalized communities in accessing formal education and it also critiques the systemic inequality where there is an unequal distribution of educational resources. The economic precarity often limits access to formal education, the line suggests how the children did not have access to traditional educational institutions like- the school. It also implies the fact that the families are not stable enough to afford formal education for their children. The poem reflects on the structural barriers that perpetuate economic precarity and educational inequality. The economic precarity inflames the power imbalance where whiteness is considered pure and privileged, marginalizing the black boy within the society. The little boy in the poem often expresses feelings of insecurity and rejection, reflecting the precarious nature of emotions which arises due to all the prejudices.

The economic precarity is subtly woven into the poem “The Little Boy Lost”. The poem explores the hardships and vulnerabilities faced by the innocent children in the late 18th century. During that era, many families were torn apart by the necessity of child labor, migration for work or death of family members due to extreme working conditions. The economic precarity is portrayed via the depiction of a vulnerable child in a state of loss and fear. In the poem, the little boy got separated from his father, which represents not only the emotional vulnerability but also the economic insecurity that exposes the children to various dangers and adversities. “The night was dark, no father was there” (line 5), This line highlights the helplessness of the poor child where he lacks the basic necessities-protection and security. Blake critiques the larger social and economic systems that fail to protect its inhabitants. In the line, “the child did weep” (line 7) depicts how the innocent child cries to reunite with his father, who does not appear to rescue him and this portrays the broader absence of societal and emotional support for the vulnerable people. The poet criticizes the government and the upper class people whom he saw as a complicit in the

perpetuation of suffering and inequality. Via this poem, Blake criticizes the economic structures of his time, highlighting how the emotions and the innocence are compromised when children are subjected to the harsh realities of a society marked by economic inequality.

Discrimination, Alienation and Instability in Blake's Poetry

William Blake's poems explore a variety of themes with a significant focus on critiquing social institutions and norms that suppress and discriminate against the freedom of human beings. He often talks about issues of poverty, social injustice and the struggles of the vulnerable people. The poet is often concerned with those who are disenfranchised by society- the children, poor and the powerless beings. By portraying the young characters' vulnerability, Blake depicts the terrible impacts of being a vulnerable individual who has no choice but to take on work in harsh conditions. The consequences of such a job are often losing their childish innocence and often ended up being alienated from society. Blake's children in "The Chimney Sweeper" are exposed to unequal and harsh treatment, highlighting society's indifference to their suffering. The poem uses the voice of an innocent young chimney sweeper to critique the societal acceptance of such exploitation as a norm and as a result children had to sacrifice their identity and stability. The poem explores and speaks to a systemic discrimination against the vulnerable and underscores the lack of agency among the children of that era. The line, "and so Tom awoke and we rose in the dark and got with our bags & our brushes to work" (line 22) highlights the systematic discrimination against these poor innocent lives who are forced to give harsh labor due to their socio-economic status. The phrase "and so Tom awoke" (line 22) followed by the immediate action of waking up for work while it is still dark conveys a sense of abruptness. This

reflects the harsh reality the children face where their lives are unstable, dominated by their labor with little room for comfort. This line sums up the miserable burden of their survival that falls upon their shoulders at such a young age. Their lives are marked by early awakenings, both literally and metaphorically, to the hardships, instabilities, and discrimination imposed by an indifferent society. Blake's mention of rising "in the dark " (line 22) underscores the children's invisibility and instability in society and the broader disregard for their well-being and childhood. Their daily routine of work explains their precarious existence- emotionally, socially, and physically.

Not only the child but also the common people in the city faced harsh treatment and a sense of alienation during the 18th century. Blake further illustrates the discrimination and alienation in his poem "London" which portrays the "mind-forg'd manacles" (line 8) to symbolize the psychological and systematic constraints that keep its people oppressed and alienated. This phrase suggests the restrictions are not imposed externally by society but are internalized by individuals, leading them to limit their own thoughts and actions. This phrase also evokes a sense of emotional vulnerability and alienation. The line- "in every cry of every man, in every infant's cry of fear" (lines 5-6) highlights the suffering and feeling of isolation across all segments of the society, from adults "every man" to the most vulnerable "every infant" (lines 5-6) . The cries of fear portray a start of life filled with uncertainty, instability and terror, symbolizing a society where even the infants are not shielded from the terrors of life. Via this poem Blake critiques the systematic oppression and instability and its deep psychological impact on all members of the society.

Blake also examines issues of racial and socioeconomic inequality, drawing attention to the precariousness of fragility in his poem, "The Little Black Boy". The poem addresses the

issues related to race by depicting a young African boy who struggles with his identity and the societal perception shaped by the color of his skin. It critiques the racial hierarchies and discrimination, offering a narrative that challenges the oppression and devaluation done towards the vulnerable people. Blake's work contemplates the societal prejudice experienced by black children who live in a world where they are regarded to be less valuable and sheds light on the injustices experienced by Black-skinned people. The black people often felt alienated due to their skin color. Blake highly focuses on anti-slavery principles and his works often depict slavery negatively; the poem is against the notion that some individuals are different from the rest of the members of society. The racial bias becomes prominent when the young child truly comprehends the circumstances surrounding him. This exhibits a state of passive adherence to cultural norms, a concept defined by Marx as a detachment from one's authentic human nature. Following Marx's idea where individuals in a capitalist system not only feel disconnected from the rewards of their work but also from their fundamental human nature. Butler's analysis of precarious life enhances this understanding by exploring how societal norms create frameworks that marginalize or diminish the importance of certain populations.

In "The Little Boy Lost," Blake also explores the psychological and emotional implications of being in an unfavorable situation. The poem shows how vulnerable, alienated and dreadful a child feels when he gets separated from his father. The line, "Father, father, where are you going? O do not walk so fast" (lines 1-2) represents a sense of separation and emotional distance where the child is left all alone. The repetition of the word "father" (line 1) emphasizes the boy's desperation and need for connection which is further intensified by his plea for the father not to walk fast. By depicting this scene, Blake criticizes societal and familial structures that value productivity or authority at the expense of nurturing, guidance and emotional

connection. The little boy's constant calling to his father represents a longing for attention and presence which he feels deprived of and as a result experiences alienation. So, this can also serve as a metaphor for the loss of protection and guidance that the lower class face when living in an uncertain socio-economic environment. The phrase, "Or else I shall be lost" (line 4) suggests a fear of literal and metaphorical losing of oneself, indicating a sense of instability. Without the guidance and communication of father, the boy fears a loss of direction and purpose, representing his unstable state in the absence of his parents. Blake condemns the social norms that foster isolation rather than prioritizing the emotional and psychological welfare of its people.

Chapter-6

Conclusion

William Blake's poetry represents the cruel facts of those difficult moments that not only encapsulate an era of systemic inequality and seclusion but also reveal the universe of a wider timeless history. He critiques not just the individual failings but of a broader societal moral decay that neglects the spiritual, economical and emotional development of individuals. His work calls for a reevaluation of social values, advocating for a society that upholds understanding and prioritizing emotions, compassion and connectivity as fundamental principles. His poems not only clarify the connection between existential and economic conditions, but also reflect on the immediate social environment in which Blake was writing. The human experience of economic existence as portrayed in the poems, gives a better insight into the complexities of human misery in different socio-economic systems which include the capitalism of the 18th century as well as the global free market of today. Blake's work depicts the consequence of economic and emotional precarity, particularly during the turbulent times of the industrial revolution in late 18th and 19th century England. His works reflect the despair brought about by poverty and the dehumanizing impacts of the emerging capitalist society. The precarity increases the alienation, discrimination, and exploitation experienced by the labor class under the rule of capitalism where there is no security and stability for the proletariat class. Blake's portrayal of the emotional precarity is intertwined with his critique of economic conditions. His works delve into the psychological sufferings of innocent lives in a materialistic world and by portraying these characters he critiques societal indifference and moral decay. The approach is multifaceted: it not only allows the modern society to appreciate the role of Blake's work in the contemporary context but also provides the reader with a precise understanding of the relationship between

literature, critical thinking and living in a specific society. The result of this paper shows the necessity of literary critique to understand and analyze humanity in the 18th century by using the theories of Marx and Butler. This helps a lot to realize the contemporary significance of Blake's work while the concept of the precariat is still under consideration in the same social context. This study revitalizes the discussion of integrating literature and philosophy to gain a more comprehensive understanding of historical and contemporary human experiences.

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