

MARXIST CRITIQUE

ON

London

William Blake

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Abstract

We have taken the poem “London”, for analysis in partial fulfillment of the assignment component of the course ‘Literary Criticism’. This is a short poem written by William Blake.

In this report, we have tried to analyze various components of Marxism in the city of “London” as described by the poet.

It was all the more important to think along the narrator’s state of thinking and point of view for reviewing this text.

About the Poet

William Blake was an English poet, painter, and printmaker. Largely unrecognized during his lifetime, Blake is now considered a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the *Romantic Age*. His visual artistry led one contemporary art critic to proclaim him "far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced". He lived in *London* his entire life except for three years spent in Felpham.

Blake is held in high regard by later critics for his expressiveness and creativity. He is also recognized for the philosophical and mystical ideas within his work. His paintings and poetry have been characterized as part of the Romantic Movement and "*Pre-Romantic*". Blake was influenced by the ideals and ambitions of the *French* and *American revolutions*, as well as by such thinkers as Jakob Bohme and Emanuel Swedenborg.

Analysis

Even though London was not really a factory town, he saw it as a symbol for the emerging Industrial Revolution's pollution of the English land and oppression of the common people. He was powerfully influenced by the French and American revolutions. His critique of the new modernity was very comprehensive ranging from imperialistic government, to industry, to the social relations of everyday life.

The text definitely portrays the working conditions of the labor class and even the helplessness of the Soldiers who were considered to be a symbol of authority.

The plight of the working class has been put to words in the text.

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

The adjective “chartered” seems to emphasise the importance of money to live every day in this materialistic world, where everything is focused around money, richness and its value to reach anything. But, despite of the role of money in the world and happiness because of its value, many people are dominated by sorrow and sadness.

The repeated use of “Marks” signifies the sufferings on the faces of common working class people.

As Marx said human beings are driven by material concerns not by ideas. The working class of London had no other choice but to follow the Church and the other political powers.

*“In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear”*

The society seems to be in **Repressive State Apparatus** (RSA). The Church and the bourgeoisie people seem to dominate the lower class relatively.

The verses “In every cry of every man” and “in every infant’s cry of fear” are examples of this fact. People are not happy. They are living in fear all the time, inside the dark of a society influenced by materialism. Human beings are losing the real sense of life.

There is lack of free expression and he uses the word "ban" which is quite clear in its meaning and reveals how people were unable to voice their criticisms on how the country was being ruled.

“*The mind-forged manacles*” - this represents people’s preoccupation for money and the dependence on the important institutions. They are not able to break free of the current system prevailing then and are clearly not happy with the situation.

*“How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackening Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.”*

This is a picture of the whole society in chains. There is a tone of anger and frustration among the sweepers (low wages). The reputation of the church is getting tarnished by the fact that child labor(chimney sweepers) is prevailing. The church is being accused of the child labor. Soldiers themselves, being a part of the armed forces are not able to voice their opinion. They also suffer because of the harsh punishments they have to give and the strict discipline to be maintained in the city. And the blood signifies the loss of lives.

The dominant forces of the super-structure (church and the palace) are controlling the base (economic). This anger of the helpless children and the soldiers can just stir up a revolution.

*“But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse”*

The child is not being loved because it is a result of commercial deed and not love and the rich man takes the infection from the harlot back to his wife.

The curse of the harlot is that the rich man's wife's carriage could turn into hearse symbolizing death in life of the wedded state. The whole scenario describes the helplessness

of the young woman who is poverty stricken and thus to survive she has to become a harlot as Marx said the economic condition drives the human being.

Conclusion

In brief, this short poem beautifully compiled by William Blake, exposes the reality of London during the time when French and American revolutions were going on and the people in London were suffering. William Blake uses some really harsh words (Blast, hapless, cry, plagues, etc.) to stress upon the misery of the working class people.

We analyzed this text using Marxism which emphasizes on the idea that economic survival of an individual plays a much greater role than being idealistic in the person's deed.

William Blake was trying to stir up a revolution by bringing the reality to people through self-introspection that makes them realize that it can all change. He wants to change the situation in London.