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# WEEK 4: INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY ON INDIVIDUALS

*BBE2082 Literature of the World*

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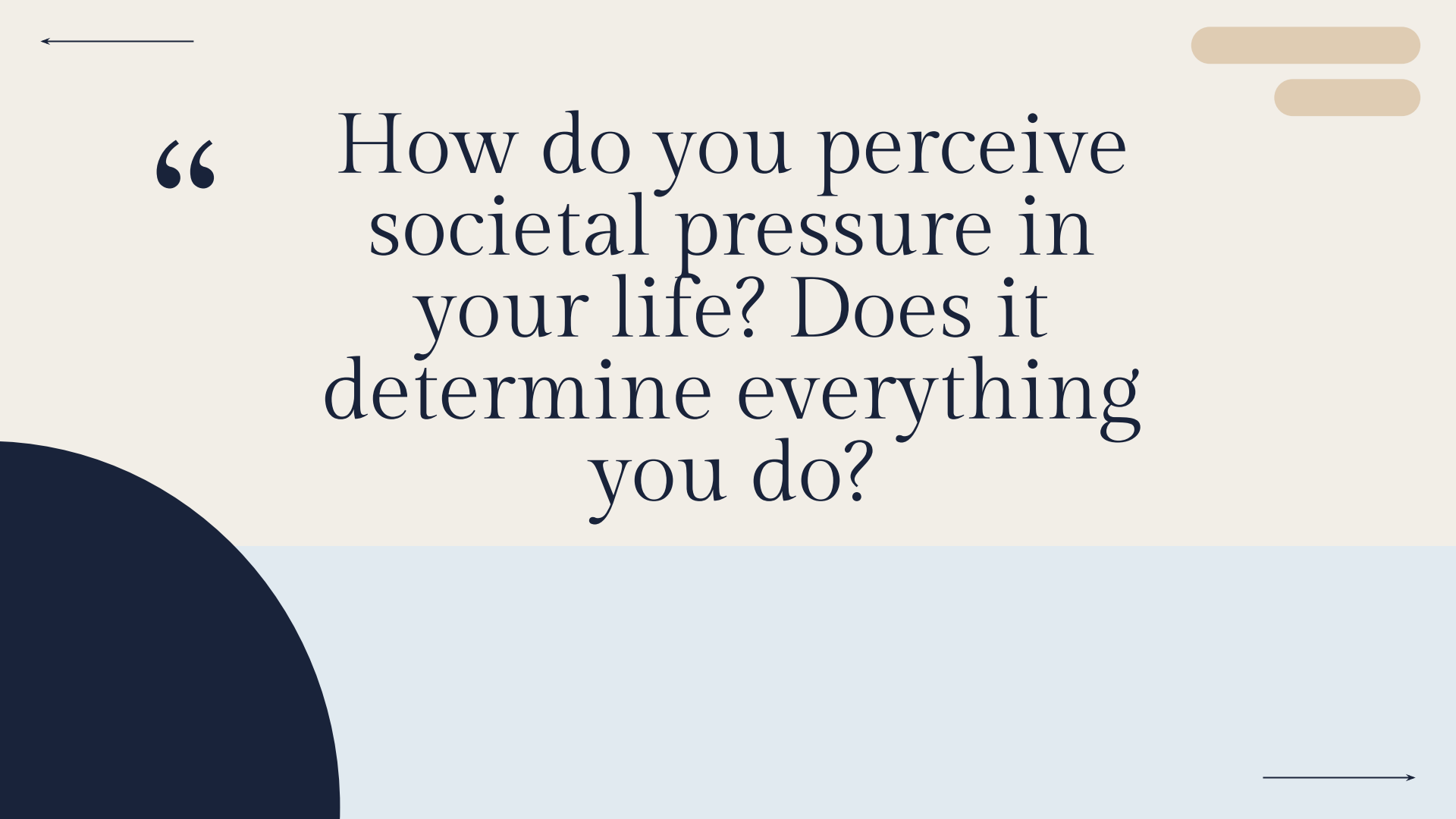


# SOCIETAL PRESSURE ON INDIVIDUAL IN LITERATURE



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“ How do you perceive  
societal pressure in  
your life? Does it  
determine everything  
you do?



# Introduction to Societal Pressure on Individual Identity in Literature

## How Societal Norms Shape Individual Behavior

- Societal expectations often dictate roles and actions, influencing how individuals see themselves and interact with others.
- Literature frequently examines the tension between conforming to societal norms and pursuing personal fulfillment.





# The Role of Literature in Exploring Societal Pressure on Identity of Individuals

Literature serves as a powerful medium for examining the ways societal norms, expectations, and pressures shape individual identity. By presenting characters who navigate conflicts between personal desires and societal demands, literature reflects the complexities of human experience and provides a lens to critique or understand cultural, political, and historical contexts.

## **Mirror of Society:**

Literature acts as a mirror, capturing the norms, traditions, and values of the time in which it is written. Authors often portray societal expectations that dictate how individuals should behave, think, or live.

*Example:* In *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, William Blake critiques societal norms, such as child labor and institutional oppression, revealing how these pressures erode innocence and freedom.





# The Role of Literature in Exploring Societal Pressure on Identity of Individuals

## **Cultural Context:**

Literature reflects the specific cultural and historical circumstances that shape societal pressures. Through storytelling, authors illustrate how societal values influence individuals' roles and decisions.

*Example:* In Naguib Mahfouz's *Zaabalawi*, the societal emphasis on materialism in modern Cairo is juxtaposed with the protagonist's search for spiritual meaning, highlighting the conflict between cultural values and personal fulfillment.





# The Role of Literature in Exploring Societal Pressure on Identity of Individuals

## **Exploration of Universal Themes:**

While grounded in specific cultural or societal settings, literature often explores universal themes, such as freedom, love, justice, and belonging. These themes resonate across time and place, providing insights into how societal pressures affect individuals universally.

*Example:* In Zaabalawi, the protagonist's spiritual journey transcends its Egyptian setting, reflecting the universal human quest for meaning in a materialistic world.







# The Role of Literature in Exploring Societal Pressure on Identity of Individuals

## **Reevaluating Norms:**

By presenting characters who struggle with societal expectations, literature prompts readers to question their own roles and beliefs within society. This self-reflection can lead to a deeper understanding of personal identity and societal influences.

*Example:* Blake's poems, such as London, challenge readers to critique the societal institutions that perpetuate inequality and suppress individual freedom.





# “02 BLAKE’S SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE”

*Written by William Blake in the late 18th century, Songs of Innocence and Experience presents a dual perspective on life: the purity and naivety of innocence versus the harsh realities of experience.*

*The collection critiques societal institutions such as religion, education, and industrialization, which Blake viewed as oppressive forces.*



# Themes in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

## **Innocence vs. Experience:**

The innocence of childhood is often corrupted by societal pressures, such as labor, poverty, and institutional control.

## **Critique of Authority and Oppression:**

Blake critiques institutions like the church and state for perpetuating inequality and stifling individuality.

## **Loss of Freedom and Individuality:**

Societal norms often suppress personal identity, as seen in the contrast between the two states of being.

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# Themes in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

## Key Poems and Their Analysis

### The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Innocence):

#### Excerpt:

*"And by came an angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins and set them all free."*

**Analysis:** This poem critiques child labor and the exploitation of innocence by societal and religious institutions, which promise salvation while perpetuating suffering.

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# Themes in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

## Key Poems and Their Analysis

### London (Songs of Experience):

#### Excerpt:

*"And the hapless soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down palace walls."*

**Analysis:** The poem portrays the suffering caused by societal structures, such as monarchy and war, highlighting the loss of individual freedom and the destructive impact of authority.

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## LONDON

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.

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

How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls

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



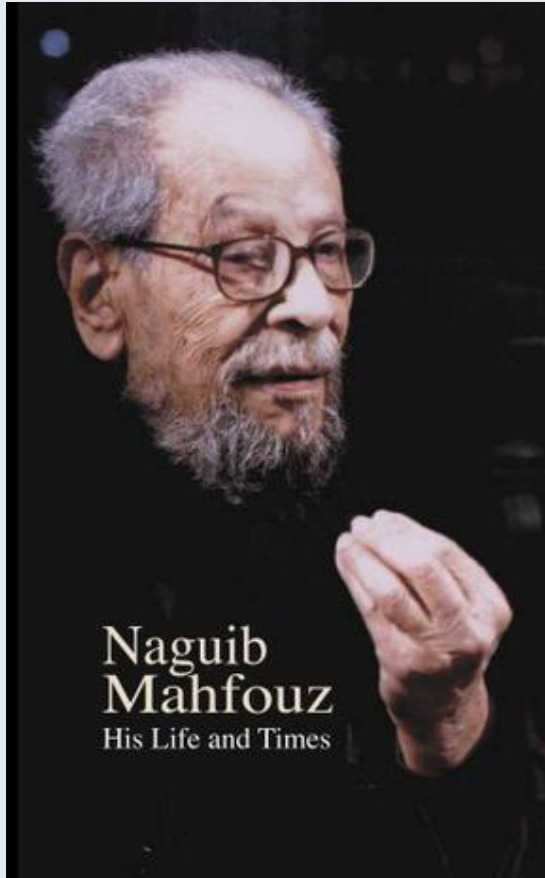
## THE Chimney Sweeper

A little black thing among the snow;  
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!  
Where are thy father & mother? say?  
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smil'd among the winters snow:  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And, because I am happy, & dance & sing,  
They think they have done me no injury;  
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,  
Who make up a heaven of our misery.





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MAHFOUZ'S  
ZAABALAWI”

*Written by Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz, Zaabalawi is a short story set in 20th-century Cairo. It follows the narrator's search for a mystical figure, Zaabalawi, representing the human quest for spiritual and personal fulfillment.*

*The story critiques the materialism and bureaucratic nature of modern society, which often hinders individuals' spiritual growth.*





# Themes in Naguib Mahfouz's Zaabalawi

## **Search for Meaning:**

The protagonist's journey reflects the human longing for spiritual peace and fulfillment in a materialistic world.

## **Critique of Materialism:**

Society's focus on wealth and power is portrayed as a barrier to true happiness and self-discovery.

## **Spiritual vs. Material Values:**

The story contrasts the simplicity of Zaabalawi's spiritual wisdom with the complexity of societal structures.







# Themes in Naguib Mahfouz's Zaabalawi

## Key Passages and Their Analysis

The Lawyer's Office:

Excerpt:

*"I am searching for Zaabalawi. 'Zaabalawi? Never heard of him. Is he rich?'"*

Analysis: This scene highlights society's fixation on wealth and dismissiveness of spiritual or non-material pursuits.





# Themes in Naguib Mahfouz's Zaabalawi

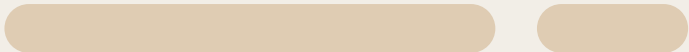
## Key Passages and Their Analysis

The Tavern Scene:

Excerpt:

*"I awoke to find Zaabalawi had gone. For a moment, I was lost in frustration, but the warmth of the drink lingered in my veins."*

Analysis: The tavern represents a fleeting moment of spiritual connection, showing how societal distractions make lasting fulfillment difficult to achieve.





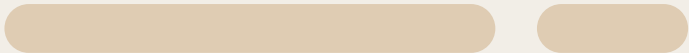
# Comparative Analysis

## **Similarities:**

- Both texts critique societal norms and expectations as barriers to personal freedom and fulfillment.
- Blake and Mahfouz highlight the tension between societal values (e.g., materialism, authority) and individual aspirations (e.g., innocence, spirituality).

## **Differences**

- Blake's critique is rooted in the contrast between innocence and experience, focusing on institutional oppression.
- Mahfouz emphasizes the struggle between spiritual and material values, reflecting a modern context.

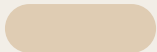
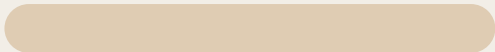




# Comparative Analysis

## Summary:

- In Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience, societal norms dictate moral and spiritual behavior, leading to a loss of innocence.
- In Mahfouz's Zaabalawi, societal materialism contrasts with the protagonist's spiritual journey, highlighting the disconnect between societal values and personal fulfillment.





# LITERARY TECHNIQUES

*Symbolism & Allegory*

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# Symbolism and Imagery in Blake

William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience heavily relies on symbolism and imagery to convey complex themes, such as societal oppression, human suffering, and the contrast between innocence and experience.

Symbolism in "The Chimney Sweeper" (Songs of Innocence):

**The "angel"** : In the poem, the angel is a symbol of hope and salvation. The angel appears in the dreams of the child laborers, unlocking their "coffins" and setting them free. This symbolizes the promise of spiritual liberation that contrasts with the physical oppression of their lives as chimney sweepers.

**Interpretation** : Blake critiques how religion, rather than addressing real-world suffering, often offers false hope or deferred salvation to justify oppressive systems.





# Symbolism and Imagery in Blake

William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience heavily relies on symbolism and imagery to convey complex themes, such as societal oppression, human suffering, and the contrast between innocence and experience.

## Imagery in "London" (Songs of Experience):

- The "palace walls" running with "blood" represent the violence and exploitation underlying the apparent stability of institutions like the monarchy and the military.
- The "mind-forged manacles" symbolize the mental and emotional constraints imposed by societal norms and expectations, showing how oppression can be both external and internalized.

**Interpretation** : Blake uses vivid imagery to expose the inequalities and dehumanizing effects of industrialization and societal hierarchy.



# Allegory in Mahfouz's *Zaabalawi*

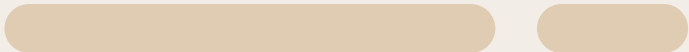
Naguib Mahfouz's *Zaabalawi* uses allegory—a literary device where characters, events, or settings represent abstract ideas or moral qualities—to explore themes of spiritual fulfillment and materialism in modern society.

## **What is Allegory?**

Allegory is a storytelling technique where the surface narrative has a deeper, symbolic meaning. Characters or events often stand for abstract concepts like love, justice, or faith.

## **Zaabalawi as an Allegory:**

*Zaabalawi* represents spiritual fulfillment, inner peace, or even divine wisdom. The protagonist's search for him mirrors humanity's quest for meaning and connection in a chaotic, materialistic world.







# Allegory in Mahfouz's *Zaabalawi*

## **The journey through Cairo:**

Each person the protagonist meets symbolizes a different aspect of society:

- The lawyer: Materialism and greed, as the lawyer values only wealth and power.
- The tavern keeper: Temporary pleasures that distract from spiritual fulfillment.
- The musician: Art and creativity, which offer fleeting glimpses of Zaabalawi's essence but are not a complete answer.

## **The tavern scene:**

When the protagonist finally feels a moment of spiritual connection (after falling asleep in the tavern), Zaabalawi has left. This illustrates the elusive nature of spiritual enlightenment in a world consumed by material concerns.

Allegory allows Mahfouz to present a layered story: on the surface, it's about a man searching for a person in Cairo, but on a deeper level, it's a meditation on how societal structures and materialism impede the pursuit of inner peace and meaning.





# Discussion & Reflection

- In *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, how does Blake portray the impact of societal norms on personal identity?
- How does the narrator's search for Zaabalawi reflect the struggle between societal expectations and spiritual fulfillment?
- Why do you think Blake uses symbols like the angel or manacles to critique society? How do these symbols make his poetry more impactful?
- In your own life, have you encountered “Zaabalawi” moments—situations where the search for meaning felt elusive due to societal distractions?





# Next class:

1. Refer to the [COURSE INFORMATION](#) document.
2. Read the stories assigned for Week 5.

