

The Use of Religious Hypocrisy in William Blake's "Holy Thursday": An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT:

This research examines the use of religious hypocrisy by William Blake through his poems "Holy Thursday" from both poetic collections "*Songs of Innocence*" and "*Songs of Experience*". This poem is a pointed political statement. The religious hypocrisy features are analyzed in this poem in order to reveal hidden meanings and hidden messages in the poem. It is important to examine the symbols of the poem in both of poetic collections. This poem can carry hidden ideological and political agenda and messages. The qualitative approach is used in this study in order to reveal and explore hidden messages and meanings. This study delves into Blake's critique of the illumination and the social values of the late eighteenth century. It sheds light on Blake's quest for a more freedom and creative human existence, contrasting it with the constraints imposed by institutionalized rationality and morality. Also, it explores the rich symbolism and profound themes that Blake presents in his poetry. This research focuses on images and symbols that are used in the poem in order to reveal the deeper meaning of the poem. This study refers to the fact that "Holly Thursday" has ideological and hidden messages to express the rejection of religious hypocrisy by the poet William Blake.

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Introduction

The opposing states of the human soul are described by William Blake's poetry through the poems "*Holly Thursday*" in both poetic collections, "*Songs of Innocence*" and "*Songs of Experience*". These poems explore the possibilities and actualities of the soul as it looks for reflections of the divine spark that is the soul's essence in the temporal universe, rather than a soul divided into two contrary pieces. William Blake presents his portrayal of children in the "*Songs of Innocence*" to make us aware of the divinity of the soul. The world of innocence is infused with love, joy, delight, and unity, as seen by poetry like "*Holly Thursday*" from the both poetic collections "*Songs of Innocence*" and the "*Songs of Experience*".

Few regarded Blake as "a man without a mask; his aim single, his path straightforwards" (Adams, 1991, p. 5). Since then, Blake has grown to be regarded as one of the masterpieces of English verse. Few writers have achieved the imaginative intensity and powerful visual impact of his poetry and mythology. *Songs of Innocence* and "*Songs of Experience*" are both a fascinating journey into this mysterious spiritual world and a severe critique of a civilization known for its inequities, cruelty, and hypocrisy. Blake's poetry, animated by his engravings, intended to challenge society's decline in values, to reverse the descent into the godless abyss of reason, and to reconcile an intrinsically holy humanity with its Creator.

"Blake's writings are an endeavour to loosen or break society's 'mind-forg'd manacles', which had been created through the edicts of a repressive church and supported by Parliament. Blake pointed to what he saw as the traditional values lost in the late 18th century. Through his poetry Blake fashioned an ideal form of human existence and weighed contemporary society against it" (Vines, 2005, pp. 116-122).

The church contributed to the mental restrictions that people faced. Blake was a faithful Christian who believed that he would be loved by God and have a good life as long as he followed Christianity. This belief was influenced by his parents (Christopher, et al, 2001, p. 215-249). However, in their role as representatives of God's will, priests and churches had turned into tools used by the ruling class to suppress free expression and even brutally stifle any doings or statements that did not stratify with Christianity in the name of God. Black refused and hated the church's deception and exposed its dark side to the public because of the stark contrast between the perfect and the real world. In the late 18th century, England was marked by stark social inequalities and widespread poverty, especially among children. Stevenson (2003, pp. 137-140) claims, "The annual Holy Thursday procession at St. Paul's Cathedral involved orphaned children from charity schools parading through London, ostensibly to celebrate their innocence and the charity extended to them by society". However, Blake's portrayal reveals a deeper irony beneath this festive cover.

William Blake's poetry, particularly in his works "*Holy Thursday*" from both "*Songs of Innocence*" and "*Songs of Experience*", serves as a deep critique of religious hypocrisy.

Through Blake's poems, He sets side by side the innocence of children with the ethical failings of society and its institutions, particularly the church. According to Bose (2023, p. 159), "Blake was a devout Christian but he had some major disagreements with the organized religion of the day. He rejected obedience to church doctrine and questioned the morality of it". Blake's poems are distinguished as romantic poetry and its known by the characteristics of mysticism, imagination, symbolism, treatment of religion and lyricism. Meanwhile, William Blake developed his own ideas about God and religion. He illustrated God and religion from a humanistic approach. He trusted his imagination over logic and reason. Blake's God was like humans but possessed exceptional abilities. The concept of God and religion is embodied in unequivocal terms in poems mainly in "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience". Blake did not deny the belief that God is eternal, omnipresent, and omniscient. He projected the role of God as both creator and destroyer. This duality of God's role in the universe characterizes most of Blake's poems (Jesse, 2013). The purpose of study examines the use of religious hypocrisy in "Holy Thursday" poem by William Blake in both of his poetic collections "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience".

Blake focuses on the religious hypocrisy through his poem by neglecting of poor children by the church. For example, Antonielli (2017) explains, "William Blake's 'Holy Thursday' critiques religious hypocrisy by contrasting the mistreatment of poor children with the ostentatious display of charity, highlighting societal injustices within religious practices". In general, the influences of Blake's religiously and philosophically led to a complex tapestry that notified his unique artistic vision, characterized by a mix of esoteric, mystical, and traditional elements.

"Holy Thursday" for William Blake is considered an affecting critique of the religious hypocrisy that was widespread in his time. Through his humanistic lens, Blake portrays God as embodied in human virtues such as mercy and love, contrasting sharply with the institutionalized religion that he condemns for its cruelty and moral failings (Bose, 2023, p. 152). The poem reflects the stark disparity between the church's ostentatious displays of piety and the suffering of the poor, particularly children, who are often neglected by society and religious institutions (Perris, 2023, pp. 629–645). Blake's critique extends to the notion of spiritual redemption, which he views as a hollow promise when juxtaposed with the lived realities of the oppressed (Jesse, 2013, p. 11). By highlighting the disconnect between the church's teachings and the actual conditions of the vulnerable, Blake underscores the moral bankruptcy of a faith that prioritizes ritual over genuine compassion, ultimately advocating for a more authentic and human-centered spirituality (Billingsley, 2018, pp. 321-334).

1. Manifestation of Hypocrisy in "Holy Thursday" poem

"Holy Thursday" poem in the "Songs of Innocence and Experience" offers two perspectives: the poet focuses on the freedom and innocence of childhood, while the other portrays the loss of innocence as human's face defies in life. The pastoral landscapes in the poetry change pure joy and freedom. Jeyashree (2022, pp. 72-80) explains: The philosophy of life's ebb and flow is clearly presented. "Holy Thursday" from the "Songs of Innocence depicts a moving image of orphaned youngsters attending church, as well as a message that those who have been fortunate should help those in need. For example, as in these lines ''Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean/ The children walking two & two, in red & blue & green/', William Blake's poetry combines mysticism and naturalism; mysticism is mixed with sorrowful melancholy. His collection of poems, the "Songs of Experience" contemplates social

hypocrisy. On accurate inspection, however, the poem is also a satirical critique of society's complacency and hypocrisy in the face of so-called "charity". For example, '*Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor/ Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door*'. In his poem, Blake's poetry reveals societal hypocrisy through themes such as good against evil, reflecting the absence of compassion and mercy in his period and underlining the need for a more caring society. Allowing the poems to have this dramatic nature, converting them into a sort of dramatic monologue, is an important step in interpreting these poems, particularly when the concept of difference within the collection of poetry is explored. According to Wanderlinde (2016, qtd. in Simpson 1979, p. 216),

"To end in the state of Experience would be to end in cynicism and perhaps despair. But in Blake's scheme there is a third state, that of wise Innocence, which synthesizes the first two [...] It is a state of 'organized' Innocence [...] a state in which the bitterness of Experience has been met, absorbed, and transcended".

This profound innocence is a sort of argumentative, positive interaction between both Innocence and Experience. Such a way of comprehending this relation suits well Blake's aphorism in "*The Marriage for Heaven and Hell*": "Without Contraries is no progression" (Blake 34). Blake deals with the poems as dramatic monologues, but also takes into account the argumentative aspect of the two contrasts, which will possibly be the nearest of the logic of the collection of poetry itself.

The religious and political institutions in England were criticized by William Blake through his poems "*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*". Hatfield (2005, p. 20) explains, Blake criticised the Church of England for two reasons. Firstly, the Church of England established a hegemonic ideology that deliberately dominated the lower class of English society through its message of temperance and acceptance of terrible living conditions. Blake's poetry exposes the Church's true aim, which was not to prevent its impoverished members from participating in excessive drinking or sin, but to suppress their awareness of the inequities and injustices of their conditions. Secondly, according to Religious Politics in English Literature, Blake's poems "*Songs of Innocence*" and "*Songs of Experience*" criticised the Church for failing to understand humanity's relationship with the Creator. The speaker in "*Holly Thursday*" of "*Songs of Innocence*" motivates the readers to convey "pity" to suffering souls, the poem implies that "pity" isn't enough. Caught up in sentimental sorrow for innocent youngsters, the poet is uninterested in addressing the culture that has brought them to this point, or the religious hypocrisy that masquerades condescension as piety.

As Antonielli (2017, pp. 329-343) claims, Blake's ideal version of Christianity lacked intermediary church administrators and instead emphasized a genuine and personal spiritual connection between an individual and his God. In Blake's poetry, the Church not only restricts but also corrupts the individual's access to the imagination, which is required to make a spiritual connection with the Creator. Basically, Blake's poetry argues that the Church not only kept people from getting connected to God, but also utilized its ideas to exploit the consciences of the lower class and the impoverished by preaching forgiveness for sins. Furthermore, Blake claimed that by acting as a mediator between Creator and creature, the Church had perverted the core of Christianity, which was a direct spiritual link between the people and God (Hatfield, 2005, pp. 40-41). The Church's position in connecting mankind to God did not match with Christ's teachings, which were in response to the misuse of political authority by priests. William Blake saw the Church's theology as the state religion, tainted by political self-interest.

2. Contraries of Innocence and Experience

William Blake reveals religious hypocrisy through conflict, critical expression, and protest in his works, especially in his song "*Holy Thursday*". These themes mirror his political and philosophical tendencies, forming his poetic vision and style. According to Suleimenova, et al. (2024, pp. 1-15.), "Blake uses themes of love, mysticism, and human existence to expose religious hypocrisy in his works, reflecting deep spiritual issues and philosophical beliefs through artistic techniques". In "*Songs of Innocence*", Blake presents a scene filled with beauty and purity. The children are described as "flowers of London town," their innocent faces glaring as they sing joyfully in church. This imagery evokes a sense of hope and divine grace; however, it is undercut by the awareness that these children are marched for public display rather than truly cared for throughout the year. According to these lines below:

"'Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean

The children walking two & two in red & blue & green

Grey-headed beadles walked before with wands as white as snow,

Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow" (Blake, 2019)

The first stanza portrays a ceremony. The musical voice recounts the transport of the children from the outreach schools to St. Patrick's Cathedral on "Holy Thursday". However, the musical voice appears to be an outside observer, as he/she describes how the children move towards the church. "Multitude of flowers" compares the children to flowers, making them appear vulnerable and innocent while also lovely. A groups can refer to a vast multitude or a mass with little influence or power. Blake repeats this word, possibly emphasizing that despite their unity, the children remain weak.

These children are used for advertising church activities. For a long time, the children are neglected without any care. William Blake focuses on the religious hypocrisy that is used by churchmen toward the children. Blake's "*Holly Thursday*" is unique through the use of poetic images and symbolism. Umakiran (2020, pp. 212-219.) claims, "the themes of Blake's poetry are related to religion, nature, purity, experience, God, social injustice, and experience".

Conversely, in "*HOLLY Thursday*", Blake adopts a more critical tone. He wonders whether it is truly holy to witness such suffering amidst abundance: "*Is this a holy thing to see, / In a rich and fruitful land, / Babes reduced to misery*". Here, he highlights the hypocrisy inherent in societal attitudes toward poverty, while the church celebrates these children on one day, it neglects their plight on all others. "In "*Holly Thursday*" Blake juxtaposes the purity of childhood with the corruption of adult society, highlighting the moral failures of religious institutions" (Umakiran, 2020, pp. 212-219).

Blake indicates the two conflicting states of the human mind in his poems "*Holly Thursday*" from the both poetic collections "*Songs of Innocence*" and "*Songs of Experience*," as well as the difference between nature and civilization. "*Holly Thursday*" poem of Experience portrays the state of human nature eroding in a civilized society, whereas "*Holly Thursday*" poem of Innocence depicts a state of harmony between man and nature. According to Wang (2022, pp. 392-399) explains, Blake establishes the mood of joy and gladness in "*Holly Thursday*" from "*Songs of Innocence*," which are inspired by the harmony that exists between nature and

humanity, but he also focused on religious hypocrisy. The contrast is that Blake discloses the darkness and other terrible occurrences in society in the "*Song of Experience*," and this revelation also serves as a critique of social civilization from the side of religious hypocrisy.

"In "*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*", we can see the hypocrisy of priests, the physical destruction and mental trauma by schools, churches and capitalist civilization, the cries of chimney sweepers, the curses of street prostitutes, the complaints of racially discriminated slaves, and so on" (Wang, 2022, pp. 392-399).

William Blake's "*Holly Thursday*" is a strong protest of his time's established conventions, particularly the hypocrisy inherent in social and ecclesiastical organizations. Blake's poetry reveals the conflict between the respected and the despised, demonstrating how cultural expectations can obscure real intentions. William Blake criticised the rationalism that was common in England at the time. This kind of ideology was related to the suppression of democracy in him, which reflected Blake's first assertion of the value of fantasy.

3. Critique of Religious Authority

The Critique of Religious Authority has profound historical and philosophical origins, reflecting a compound interaction between individual autonomy and institutional ability. The various traditions led to create the critique of Religious Authority, especially within Christianity and Islam, where the nature and legality of authority have been rigorously argued. According to Radde-Antweiler and Grünenthal (2018), the critique of religious authority draws attention to the need for individual participation and critical thinking, it also causes questions about the potential chaos that could emerge from a thorough rejection of established authority, indicating a delicate balance must be maintained.

Enlightenment concepts of rationale and individualism are manifested in the poetry of William Blake as critiques of religious authority. challenging traditional doctrines and defending personal spiritual experience. Blake's "*Holly Thursday*" poems reflect a deep humanistic philosophy that concentrates on the importance of individual perception and ethical autonomy. Blake condemns the oppressive nature of institutional religion, which he views as a tool of tyranny that stifles individual freedom and creativity (Wang, 2022). William Blake's "*Holly Thursday*" poems serve as a deep critique of religious authority in the eighteenth century in England, challenging traditional depictions of God and the Church's ethical prescriptions. Blake's "*Holly Thursday*" poems discover a humanistic dimension that emphasizes the God within humanity's soul, contrasting strongly with established religious criteria (Bose, 2023).

The poetry of William Blake is influenced by a diverse arrangement of religious and philosophical conventionalism, like Christianity, actually, Blake's writings frequently demonstrate a strong correlation with the Christian creed, especially his examination of biblical themes and figures. He believes the Judaism and Christianity as rose from the "Poetic Genius," implying a syncretic approach to religion. "Blake was likely introduced to Kabbalistic themes through texts like the *Kabbala Denudata* by Knorr von Rosenroth" (Antonielli, 2017). This impact is discussed among scholars, with some recommendations that Kabbalistic elements in Blake's poetry may not be direct but rather refereed by other philosophical traditions. According to Antonielli (2017), Gnosticism and Hermeticism are considered as a part of Blake's philosophical foundation includes elements of Gnosticism and Hermetic thought, which emphasize on the significance of internal knowledge and the divine light within humanity. This stratifies with his belief in the "Poetic Genius" as a provenance of fact and

creativity. In addition, William Blake understood the cosmos and the relationship between the divine and the material world through Neoplatonism and Orphic Traditions, which influenced his point of view of a spiritual reality that transcends the material world.

As Elsherif (2016) said, "Blake's depiction of wise guardians of the poor" further highlights this hypocrisy. These figures are portrayed as non-active and usurious rather than merciful caretakers. They represent an institutional religion that fails to act on its moral obligations towards those it claims to protect, as in the lines below:

"Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door" (Blake, 2019)

The songs of children become mere performances intended to reassure benefactors rather than real expressions of need or joy. According to Vines (2005, p. 116)), the rhetorical question constituted by Blake, "*Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door,*" serves as both a warning and an indictment against those who turn a blind eye to suffering while claiming piety. "It suggests that true holiness lies not in ritualistic displays but in authentic compassion for others" (Ryan, 2003, pp. 152-180).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, William Blake criticizes religious hypocrisy through his poem "*Holy Thursday*". Blake invites audiences to confront uncomfortable facts about social values and moral responsibilities. His poetry motivates a re-evaluation of what it means to be philanthropic and calls for authentic empathy towards those who suffer, not just during ceremonial situations but every day. Blake's "*Holy Thursday*" poem is a much-evoked part of the English canon, and for good reason. Blake's "*Holy Thursday*" portrays a dilemma that continues to our present time. The struggle of high-order humanity against the 'truth' of rationality and ethics of institutionalized society. William Blake's poetry is considered a deep criticism of the social criteria of his time, especially reflecting the hypocrisy rooted within the social and religious attitudes. Blake's "*Holly Thursday*" poems from both poetic collections, the "*Songs of Innocence*" and "*Songs of Experience*" explore the stress between the venerable and the despicable, explaining how societal expectations often hide factual intentions to deal with humanitarian situations for poor people.

استخدام النفاق الديني في قصيدة "خميس الأسرار" لويليام بليك: دراسة تحليلية

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ملخص البحث:

تتناول هذه الدراسة كيفية استخدام وليم بليك للنفاق الديني من خلال قصيدته "الخمس المقدس" من أغاني البراءة من كلا المجموعتين الشعريتين أغاني البراءة وأغاني التجربة. هذه القصيدة عبارة عن بيان سياسي واضح. وقد تم تحليل ملامح النفاق الديني في هذه القصيدة من أجل الكشف عن المعاني والرسائل الخفية في القصيدة. حيث من المهم دراسة رموز القصيدة في كلا المجموعتين الشعريتين. لأن هذه القصيدة يمكن لها أن تحمل أجندات ورسائل أيديولوجية وسياسية خفية. يتم استخدام المنهج النوعي في هذه الدراسة من أجل كشف واستكشاف الرسائل والمعاني المخفية بين سطور القصيدة. تتعمق هذه الدراسة في نقد بليك للتنوير والقيم الاجتماعية في أواخر القرن الثامن عشر. تسلط الضوء على سعي بليك إلى وجود إنساني أكثر حرية وإبداعاً، وتقارنه بالقبود التي فرضتها العقلانية والأخلاق المؤسسية. كما تستكشف الرمزية الغنية والموضوعات العميقة التي يقدمها بليك في شعره. حيث يركز هذا البحث على الصور والرموز المستخدمة في القصيدة من أجل الكشف عن المعنى الأعمق في القصيدة. وتشير هذه الدراسة إلى أن "الخمس المقدس" يحمل رسائل أيديولوجية خفية للتعبير عن رفض النفاق الديني عند الشاعر وليم بليك.