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Postcolonial narration in the greatest romantic work of William Blake's "the little black boy"

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ABSTRACT

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William Blake was a great poet, who was born in 1757 in London. He had supreme ability in being artist even in his youth. Blake composed "The Little Black Boy" in 1789, when he was 32 years old. In this poem he talks by language of a black boy who suffers from discrimination, existing between black and white skins. The infant black boy listen to his mother words, who infused her belief in God and Life after death to her young sad boy. In this study attempts is made to analyze this poem from Postcolonial studies and find its root and reason which is, according to Postcolonial studies, in imperialism of nineteenth century.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Poet's biography

William Blake was a great poet, artist, and a mystic man who was born on November 1757, in London. He was son of the hosier father and he had three brothers and a sister. He was the second son and the eldest brother, James, kept on their father's hosiery business. The third son, John, died very young and left the depraved life. The youngest boy, Robert, who was deserved to be as an artist, and was loved by William, became ill and unfortunately at the age of 21 left William alone.

William appeared his interest and love to art and artistic things at his early life. When he was ten years old, he was sent to painting class in Strand. Very soon, after five years, at age fifteen, he was regarded as a skilled engraver. He was influenced by the style of Gothic and drawing of tombstone in Westminster Abbey was made by his hand. His talent shows itself in his early poems which are printed and kept in a book by name of *Poetical Sketches* in 1783. This book contains all poems by William Blake, from twelve to twenty years old.

One of his work was engraving, which in 1779 Blake started to work as an expert. Blake always work for booksellers and engrave the cover of book for publishers and earned his money, especially during his life to forty, by this mean. Two years later, he became familiar with illiterate Catherine Boucher and married her in 1782. She was a perfect wife and very soon learned drawing and painting from her husband, William Blake, and helped him in working. But unfortunately, she left him without any child and died in 1831.

During his life, he said a lot of poems, in 1785 by *An Island in the Moon* he makes fun his own society. He completed *The Book of Thel* (1789); *America* (1793); *Songs of Experience* (1794); *The Book of Los*, and *The Song of Los* (1795) when he was living in Lambeth.

Among all his great works, maybe his principal poetic works is: *Poetical Sketches* (1783); *Tiriell* (1789); *Songs of Innocence* (1789); *The Book of Thel* (1789- 1791); *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793); *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794); *Europe, A Prophecy* (1794); *America, A Prophecy* (1794); *The Book of Urizen* (1794); *The Book of Ahania* (1795); *The Songs of Los* (1795); *Vala or The Four Zoas* (1796- 1807); *Milton* (1804- 1815); *Jerusalem* (1804- 1820).

2. Discussion

2.1. Postcolonial studies

Postcolonialism is a term which has its root in imperialism, by looking briefly in its history, we want to find the length of its root. Habib in his "A History of Literary Criticism" (2005) states that " the word imperialism derives from the Latin imperium, which has numerous meanings including power, authority, command, dominion, realm, and empire". Thus imperialism is as a plan which aim is to control the people under the dominate state not by using weapon or military force, but by using cultural and economic forces through them. The dominant ruler always impose its rules and trades on people. It also enforces its language, cultural, social, and economical values on suppressor. The last decades of nineteenth century is the date which imperialism is backed to, but it is older than what we know about it. Both sides of the world, Western and Eastern, had been under the dominant empire, and each sides had its own rules and suppressor and suppressed. " Chinese empires extending from the eleventh century bc to the tenth century after Christ; the Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Assyrian, and Persian empires; the empires of the Greeks, which reached a climax with the conquests of Alexander the Great; the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and the various empires of Islam which lasted until the early twentieth century" (Habib, 2005).

Postcolonial criticism is a sort of cultural criticism, always contains the critical view and analysis of texts and peices of art wrote by people and cultures who are in some period of time under the European control of colonial and racial powers at their past and history. Actually, it refers to the way of criticizing and analyzing texts written by authors in colonized places and colonized cultures. Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), one of the great philosopher and a forerunner of postcolonial studies and the way of criticizing it, concentrates on the way in which Third World is colonized by First World, European countries, because of some false myths and pictures which is created and justifies by Western countries and their domination on Eastern and Middle Eastern peoples and cultures and makes them to be subordinated countries. Homi K. Bhabha in his essay by name of "Postcolonial Criticism" (1992), has depicted the way in which all the certain cultures determine other countries' cultures, in that connection by which all their social, cultural, and political domination is extended not only on Third World countries, but also on all today's world system and arrangement.

"Postcolonial criticism has embraced a number of aims: most fundamentally, to reexamine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities" (Habib, 2005).

According to the great critics of postcolonialism, there are some key concepts for this school.

Ambivalence is a vague way of regarding each other among colonizer and colonized. The colonizer always regards the colonized as subordinated but foreign, while colonized considered the colonizer as admirable and attractive but evil. According to Julian Wolfreys et. all in "Key Concepts in Literary Theory" (2006), ambivalence is the " term signals powerful mutually contradictory feelings concerning a particular subject or the uncertainty arising from such an unresolved state. Employed in particular strands of postcolonial critical discourse and developed specifically from the work of Homi Bhabha, ambivalence in this context signifies the condition produced through the discourse of mimicry, whereby in the process of imposing on the colonial subject the desire to render that subject the same as the colonizer, there is produced, say Bhabha, a difference, slippage one excess. Thus the colonial other is produced as almost, but not quite, the same, thereby producing disquiet in the colonialist, and thus a renewal of the fear of the other."

Another key term for postcolonial studies is subaltern which is, by Gregory Castle in " The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory" (2007), the "term refers to social groups – e.g., migrants, shantytown dwellers, displaced tribes, refugees, untouchable castes, the homeless – that either do not possess or are prevented from possessing class consciousness and who are in any case prevented from mobilizing as organized groups. In this limited sense, subalternity refers to many but not all strata of colonized peoples. Antonio Gramsci introduced the current critical meaning, but the term is grounded in the idea of subject races, a term put forward by Lord Cromer in 1907 to refer to non-European peoples. The colonialist frame of reference that envisioned subaltern races could do so only because it was supported by MANICHEAN IDEOLOGY of racial difference." Thus the colonized or lower classes have little self-recognition and they have to use the systems and methods of colonizer for expressing their idea and themselves.

The third vital term of this school is race. Race is the separation between human being and make classification by considering physical, political, social, biological, and economical characteristics. It is often used in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in order to keep the power on a special group which is always European colonial power and make other slave or subordinated because of the lack of power or skin color. In "Key Concepts in Literary Theory" by Julian Wolfreys (2006), " race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems'. Thus, as discursive, political and ideological term, race functions frequently as a means of definition based on binary oppositions between self and other, civilized and savage and so on."

2.2. Analyzing the poem of "the little black boy" under postcolonial criticism

By looking closely on the poem one can understand that the little boy come up with his hard life and count it as a gift or present of God. He accepts it just as it is makes use of it in a best way, although his life is not easy at all. Because of his black skin, his life is hard, he can not play with those children who have white skin. His life is not as a delightful and pleasurable one.

"And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove" (Blake, 1789).

As his mother tells him, the light and heat absorb by "flowers and trees and beasts and men" like "comfort in morning joy in noonday" (line 12), but as a human, he has to learn to bear and tolerate the "beams of love" (line 14). However he knows that his life is too hard, maybe because of color of his skin, but he becomes thankful for his hard life. The little black boy takes all the words and lessons from his mother as a lead to living with understanding and perception. According to his mother words, he wants to live the life fully and receives all the beams of light and love which is radiated from God to flowers, trees, animals and all the human beings. She declares that by death of body, the soul is released and enters

heaven and starts a new life there. Body "is but a cloud, and like a shady grove" which by death is hid like a cloud. There is no exact point that shows life as a compensation and reward of all the pains they bear in this world. The beams and rays of God's love to their creature, in the shade of grove are perceived; maybe it is a time to perceive the light of heaven, enjoy the real life, and playing around the God' "golden tent". The warmth in heaven is like the earth's warmth, the former one is the heat of love and God's delight from his creature and it is endured, but the latter is the fake warmth of sun that may disappear and it is not everlasting warmth which human can invest on it. Another point in "The Little Black Boy" is "the English boy" who refers to all white skin humans. The little black boy can receives the heat of love in heaven because he has learned in the earth to get the heat of sun and the heaviness of white people who can not receive the heaven's warmth of love, because they donot experience the warmth of passionate to others and always look at other, especially blacks, with disdain. The white boy is more likely to stay on earth, he does not have any opportunity to receives the beams of love, maybe he never gets opportunity to other to express them and always sees himself as a repressor and dominant race and black skin people as repressed and subordinate race. The black boy compares himself with white boy and hopes that in the heaven they will not have any distance from each other.

"For when our souls have learned the heat to bear,
The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice,
Saying, Come out from the grove, my and care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice" (Blake, 1789).

As the clouds, the symbol of bodies, disappear, the black and white become the same which there is no difference between them in heaven and both the white and black boys can play with each other around "the tent of God", as never before. Lamb in Blake's work is always sign of innocence and because children are innocent, here, lambs refer to children and their innocence soul.

In one hand the black boy is regarding his present situation and his misery, but in other hand he thinks about his position in heaven and his opportunity in earth to depicts his passion soul which helps those who always regards him as a subordinator. This advantage of his soul enables him to keeps on this work in the next life, too. Life on the earth enables him to know the pleasures of heaven, in other word heaven is a place to taste all the exercises that they do on earth. The "shady grove" and "cloud" are appreciative refuge for filtering the beams of sun, and all the factors which makes us know Him, not to be away from Him and all his satisfactory things.

"My mother taught me underneath a tree,
And, sitting down before the heat of day,
She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And, pointed to the east, began to say:
Look on the rising sun: there God does live,
And gives His light, and gives His heat away;
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive,
Comfort in morning, joy in noonday" (Blake, 1789).

From above mentioned poem, it is some noteworthy comments which is necessary to note that the little black boy accepts his different face, so Blake enters in the position and mind of both mother and son in his imagine. The mother suffers from their temporary positions and even she is a source of pleasure, joy, and pride because of their passion soul and black skin. By representing the world and body as a cloud that absorbs God's love rays and after some time it ceases to exist and vanishes, she wants to change all the standards and rules around her lovely son. She says, his body absorbs the God's love rays better, because it adapted for bearing goodness. Another noteworthy point is their believing in next life. From his childhood, his mother sits him on her knees and speaks about after worldly life. They believe in hell and heaven, and in good and bad deeds. It is so respectful that a mother takes time for learning her child all the valuable things and what is in religion. The last stanza of poem refers to the time, when the little black boy sees himself, equally, in heaven along with English child:

"I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear,
To lean in joy upon our Father's knee;
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair
And be like him, and he will then love me" (Blake, 1789).

He wishes "to be like him"- shows his lack of self-confident and self-respect because of lacking self image. But the positive point is his passionate, can not live alone and without companion of others. He is delightful because their father is the same, they have the same source, and there is not any difference between them in heaven and both of them sit on God's knee equally, not like world which one of them is upper and the other lower.

3. Conclusion

"The Little Black Boy" is a poem about a black boy who suffers from discrimination. He dreams about a day with the same right to white skin's boy. He sits in his mothers lap and hears stories about the heaven. It shows their stable and firm believe in God and the life after death. In their idea, their real life is occurred when they separate from their body which absorbs all the God's love beams and it helps them to practice passionate and affection to others in this world. By studying this poem from Postcolonial Criticism, it is easy understanding notion about the cultural and economic differences that makes one as repressed and the other as repressor. Differences in race, social and politics are some other reasons for discrimination and these class-differences. The issue for Postcolonial Criticism is not the right of succession or the right of governing, but the issue is contributing the same respect to all peoples, not recognize non-European as an other and an animal-like slave, without any regard to his/her humanity.

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