

Engels' critique of the "magnificent city"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

With technological innovations rising as quickly as the population, the Industrial Revolution not only symbolizes a period of expansion and advancement, but it also reflects the dramatic changes on the economic and social structure of England. Frederic Engels' *The Conditions of the Working Class of England* discusses the binary effects of the Industrial Revolution by examining the progress and setbacks of the new England. Through analyzing the rhetorical elements employed in the writing, Engels suggests that the Industrial Revolution is both a humanitarian disaster as well as a necessary stage in human progress. Through analyzing the imagery, depictions, and descriptions in the comparison of the working area to the wealthy in Manchester, Engels depicts the advantages and disadvantages of the Industrial Revolution and how both contribute to dissonance in the social realm of England. Ultimately, through analyzing the distinctions and separations of geography described by not only the language, but also the structure of the writing, Engels claims that the developments in industry and commerce in the 19th century come with a price of separation: the union of the aristocrats divides the proletariat; the creation of the great towns leads to social inequity. In *The Conditions of the Working Class of England*, Engels utilizes rhetorical techniques of anaphora and rhetorical questioning to manifest the Industrial Revolution as having opposing effects of a humanitarian disaster and an essential change for England. In the opening paragraph to the chapter entitled *The Great Towns*, Engels claims that "Here [England] the manners and customs of the good old days have been most effectively destroyed. Here the very name of "Merry England" has long since been forgotten, because the inhabitants of the great manufacturing centers have never even heard from their grandparents what life was like in

<https://assignbuster.com/engels-critique-of-the-magnificent-city/>

those days" (1565). By starting these two sequential sentences with the word " here," there is a greater emphasis on how the changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution is impacting England. The breaking of old tradition strips England from its innate quality, customs, and manners, epitomized by the capitalization of the word Merry as now the name has disappeared. In addition, Engels uses phrases such as " the great manufacturing centers" and " most effectively destroyed," to show the advantages and essentiality of the industrial developments. The anaphora then establishes a tone of opposition even though the two sentences begin with the same word. When Engels refers to the thousands of men and women coming from different social classes and ranks into one city of London, he questions, " Are they not all human beings with the same innate characteristics and potentialities? Are they not all equally interested in the pursuit of happiness? And do they not all aim at happiness by following similar methods?"(1566). In this knit of questions, Engels intertwines again the use of anaphora with the rhetorical questioning, causing a quickening in the pace of Engels arguments and establishing a tone of frustration. By starting the questions with the phrase " Are they not," in the form of rhetorical questioning, Engels crescendos the unifying factors of society only to have it come crashing down into the simple statement that " they rush past each other as if they had nothing in common" (1566). Through the rhetorical techniques of anaphora and rhetorical questioning, Engels first affirms the unity of the people brought together as having the same innate characteristics, potentialities, and pursuit of happiness, only to exude a world of discord in the end, thereby showing how the Industrial Revolution can be deemed as a humanitarian disaster as well as a necessary stage in human progress. Because

Manchester is deemed the “ masterpiece of the Industrial Revolution and at the same time the mainspring of all the workers’ movement,” Engels utilizes clear descriptions with specific word choices and vivid delineations of the “ classic home of English industry” to reveal the dissonance in the social realms of England (1567). Emphasizing the overpopulation of people and the limited size of the land, Engels delineates the working class districts of Manchester as having houses that are “ dirty, old, and tumble-down,” following a “ policy of cramming as many houses as possible onto such spaces,” so “ that today not an inch of space remains between the houses and any further building is now physically impossible” (1568-69). Engels also illustrates the lack of hygiene as “ filth and garbage abounded” and dirty water is the only available means of washing. On the other hand, Engels paints a picture of the evolution of the modern system of manufacture with emphasis on the word “ replace.” In a pattern of the new replacing the old, the “ water and steam power first replaced hand machines;” “ the power-loom and the self-acting mule replaced the old hand-loom and spinning wheel” (1567). Therefore, although technological developments have shaped England into an industry of modernity and efficiency in the clear portrayals of replacements, Engels does not allow his readers to stray from the image of degradation into which the working classes sink to. As factories and cities are created, Londoners are forced to be packed into tiny spaces, consequentially leading to the brutal indifference with which they ignore their neighbors and selfishly concentrate upon their private effects” (1566). Therefore, even in Engels’ account of Manchester through imagery is there separation. Manchester is not only the “ heart of industry in the United Kingdom,” but it also symbolizes a society of forced class relations (1567). As <https://assignbuster.com/engels-critique-of-the-magnificent-city/>

a result of creating corporate buildings and living spaces, street pavements and bridges, overpopulation and overcrowding of people and material object become a severe consequence. Lastly, by analyzing the clear-cut distinctions and separations in not only the geography of Manchester and the social classes through its language of paradox, but also the structure of the work, Engels shows that there is separation amongst the developments that are thought to unify differences. Juxtaposing the upper class with the proletariat, Engels reveals through the geographical setting, the upper class as living in “luxurious and comfortable dwellings which are linked to the center of Manchester by omnibuses...[and] can travel from their houses to their places of business in the center of the towns by the shortest routes, which run entirely through working-class districts” (1568). Not only is there a lack of convergence between the various social classes, but there is also a clear division of space in the geographical structure of the city. Similarly, playing with the language of paradox, Engel writes “the strongest of all, a tiny group of capitalists, monopolize everything, while the weakest, who are in the vast majority, succumb to the most abject poverty” (1566). How come the majority can overrule and/or overthrow the minority? While Manchester is indeed a “great town,” it is a place where one finds “the most barbarous indifference and selfish egotism” and “the most distressing scenes of misery and poverty” (1566). Not only has the Industrial Revolution led to a geographical construction that ostracizes the slums from the country side, but it has also created a social order in which class warfare is prevalent and inextinguishable. Ultimately, the structure of Engels' work is unique in how it is laid out. Engels never seems to interlace the rich and the poor together in one paragraph, but rather writes in separated paragraphs descriptions of

each class. For example, Engels lays out the structure and details of the wealthy aristocrats residing in the countryside in one paragraph, but introduces the proletariat in a separate paragraph, beginning with " I will now give a description of the working-class districts of Manchester" (1568). The clear separation of form, geography, and class structure shows that even though necessary progress and advancements have been made in a rapidly growing country, social conflicts and divisions have been created, the working-class have suffered tremendously through their toils and hardships. In the end, the comforts and luxuries of industry is solely associated and experienced by the gentry, but these privileges come at the cost of the working-class and an even more divided country. By examining the various rhetorical devices and formal elements utilized in Frederic Engels's writing, *The Conditions of the Working Class of England*, one can see the binary effects created by the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution, marked by new developments and advancements in technology and machinery, strengthened the society as a whole in commerce and economics, but ultimately shattered the lives of the working-class. Written in the perspective of a person traveling through the streets of London, one can only see the price paid for the magnificence of the city if he endures a visit to the slums. Everything has a price: " The inhabitants of modern London have had to sacrifice so much that is best in human nature in order to create the wonders of civilization with which their city teems" (1566).