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1I wander thro' each charter'd street,2Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.3And mark in every face I meet4Marks of weakness, marks of woe.5In every cry of every Man,6In every Infants cry of fear,7In every voice: in every ban,8The mind-forg'd manacles I hear9How the Chimney-sweepers cry10Every blackning Church appalls,11And the hapless Soldiers sigh12Runs in blood down Palace walls13But most thro' midnight streets I hear14How the youthful Harlots curse15Blasts the new-born Infants tear16And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse The poem: London by William Blake 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. Analysis William Blake's London, first published in 1794 as part of his Songs of Experience, is a haunting and politically charged poem that explores the darker side of urban life in the late 18th century. The poem, deeply rooted in the socio-political context of its time, critiques the oppressive structures of power and the resulting human suffering. Its vivid imagery, powerful use of sound, and tightly controlled structure reflect Blake's anger at the institutions that enslave human freedom—making it a vital part of the AQA GCSE Power and Conflict anthology. Historical Context To understand London, it is important to consider the historical backdrop. Blake lived during a time of great social upheaval: the Industrial Revolution was transforming Britain, bringing wealth to a few and misery to many. Poverty, child labour, disease, and the exploitation of the working class were rampant, especially in cities like London. Blake was also heavily influenced by the American and French Revolutions and the Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality. However, he saw Britain becoming more repressive rather than freer, with institutions like the Church and Monarchy complicit in maintaining control. Blake himself was a radical thinker, often critical of the Church, state, and economic exploitation. He was part of the Romantic movement, which valued emotion, nature, and individual freedom over reason and industrialisation. London is a product of these views—it's a deeply political poem that uses a first-person speaker to present a damning indictment of his city. Structure and Form Blake's London is a four-stanza poem, each consisting of four lines (quatrains) written in iambic tetrameter (four stressed syllables per line). The consistent ABAB rhyme scheme gives the poem a rigid, almost monotonous feel—echoing the oppressive and inescapable conditions Blake describes. This tight structure contrasts with the chaotic, disturbing content, creating a sense of entrapment, mirroring the theme of lack of freedom. The regular rhythm might also reflect the relentlessness of suffering in the city. Themes in 'London' 1. Oppression and Lack of Freedom From the outset, Blake depicts London as a place where freedom is absent: "I wander through each charter'd street" The word "charter'd" is key here. It means regulated or controlled by a charter, often granted by authority. Blake repeats this word in "charter'd Thames", implying that even the natural river is not free. To a modern teenager, this suggests the total control of every aspect of the city, even nature itself, by powerful institutions. This idea continues in: "And mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe." The repetition of "mark" is a clever play on words. First, it means to notice or observe, but also refers to visible signs of suffering. Everyone in London bears these metaphorical or even physical signs of despair. 2. Institutional Power and Corruption Blake attacks several key institutions: government, religion, and monarchy. These are portrayed not as protectors, but as sources of suffering. "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban, / The mind-forg'd manacles I hear." The phrase "mind-forg'd manacles" is a powerful metaphor. "Manacles" are chains or shackles, often for prisoners. Blake suggests that people are imprisoned not only physically, but mentally—indoctrinated by institutions to accept their suffering. These are "forged" by the mind, implying that societal norms and beliefs are responsible for people's psychological imprisonment. Religious hypocrisy is attacked in: "How the Chimney-sweeper's cry / Every black'ning Church appalls;" Here, the cry of the chimney-sweeper—a symbol of child labour and exploitation—"appalls" the church. But Blake uses irony: the Church is "black'ning" both literally and morally. It is complicit in this suffering, turning a blind eye or even participating in it. Finally, the monarchy is condemned in: "And the hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls." This is a bold, revolutionary image. The Palace walls, representing royalty, are metaphorically stained with the blood of soldiers. Blake suggests that the elite's luxury is bought at the cost of human life, perhaps referring to war or the general suffering under the monarchy. 3. Decay of Innocence The final stanza of the poem focuses on sexual exploitation and moral decay: "But most thro' midnight streets I hear / How the youthful Harlot's curse / Blasts the new-born Infant's tear / And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse." Here, Blake connects prostitution ("youthful Harlot") to the destruction of innocence and marriage. The "curse" may be both a literal curse (shouting abuse) and a metaphor for sexually transmitted disease. The oxymoron "Marriage hearse" brings together love and death, suggesting that even marriage, once sacred, is now corrupted. Key Literary Devices 1. Repetition Blake uses repetition throughout the poem to emphasise suffering and convey the inescapability of the city's oppression: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban…" This anaphora (repeating a phrase at the start of successive lines) hammers home the ubiquity of misery. 2. Alliteration Blake uses alliteration to add sound effects that reinforce meaning: "Marks of weakness, marks of woe" The repetition of "w" sounds almost like a whimper or sobbing. "Blights with plagues the Marriage hearse." The harsh "b" and "p" sounds mimic spitting or cursing, enhancing the sense of bitterness and decay. 3. Metaphor and Symbolism "Mind-forg'd manacles" – A metaphor for mental imprisonment. "Black'ning Church" – Symbol of religious hypocrisy. "Marriage hearse" – Oxymoron symbolising the death of love and innocence. Challenging Vocabulary Explained For modern UK teenagers, here are some difficult terms: Charter'd – Controlled or owned (suggesting restriction). Mark – Notice or see, but also visible sign. Woe – Great sorrow or distress. Ban – A law or command; here it can mean both social orders and prohibitions. Mind-forg'd manacles – Shackles or chains made by mental control or beliefs. Appalls – Horrifies or shocks. Blights – Ruins or spoils. Harlot – An old term for a prostitute. Hearse – A vehicle for carrying a coffin. Understanding these words is essential for high-level analysis. Comparison with Other Poems in the Anthology 1. Checking Out Me History – John Agard Both poems deal with oppression. While Blake criticises political and religious institutions, Agard focuses on the erasure of identity through colonial education. Both use metaphor powerfully (e.g., "bandage up me eye" vs "mind-forg'd manacles") to show how language and ideas control people. 2. Ozymandias – Percy Bysshe Shelley Like Blake, Shelley criticises abuse of power. Ozymandias' crumbling statue is a metaphor for the transience of power. Blake shows the living misery of people under oppressive institutions, whereas Shelley shows how tyrants fade, but their damage lingers. 3. The Émigrée – Carol Rumens London and The Émigrée both use a city as a symbol, but in different ways. Blake's city is diseased and decaying, whereas Rumens' speaker romanticises her city of origin, despite its corruption. Grade 9 Exam Strategy To achieve a Grade 9, students need to: 1. Know the Poem Deeply Memorise key quotes and know how they relate to themes and context. Understand all literary devices and why Blake uses them. 2. Make Original Points Don't just repeat what teachers or guides say. For example, argue how the structure (tight form) contrasts with the chaotic suffering, suggesting lack of escape. 3. Use Comparative Analysis Be able to compare London clearly to another poem from the anthology, using language, structure and form, as well as themes. Example: "While Blake uses rigid iambic tetrameter to reflect urban control, Agard uses irregular rhyme and Caribbean dialect to resist cultural oppression." 4. Link to Context Thoughtfully Don't just drop in facts. Connect them. Instead of: "Blake lived during the Industrial Revolution," say: "Blake's portrayal of child labour in 'chimney-sweeper's cry' reflects the grim reality of urban poverty during the Industrial Revolution, where children were often exploited with the Church's silent approval." 5. Zoom-in on Language Go beyond surface-level: "'Mind-forg'd manacles' is a metaphor showing how people are chained by beliefs. Blake may be suggesting that it's not just external control, but internal acceptance of injustice that keeps people oppressed." Conclusion William Blake's London is a masterfully constructed critique of society's failure to protect its people. Through vivid imagery, biting irony, and rich metaphor, Blake exposes the moral and psychological chains that bind the citizens of London. For GCSE students, understanding the poem's historical roots, its brilliant use of language, and its comparative relevance is key to unlocking top grades. Comparing Blake's themes of oppression, control, and decay with other poems in the anthology enables students to deepen their insight and demonstrate the high-level analysis needed for a Grade 9. I wandered through each chartered street,Near where the chartered Thames does flow,And mark in every face I meet,Marks of weakness, marks of woe.In every cry of every man,In every infant's cry of fear,In every voice, in every ban,The mind-forged manacles I hear:How the chimney-sweeper's cryEvery blackening church appalls,And the hapless soldier's sighRuns in blood down palace-walls.But most, through midnight streets I hearHow the youthful harlot's curseBlasts the new-born infant's tear,And blights with plagues the marriage-hearse.Summary and AnalysisIntroduction: In 'London' Blake decries the three great evils of society - callousness of society as exemplified by the chimney sweeper's miserable life, the adversity of war as expressed in the case of the soldier, and lust represented in the malpractice of harlotry that looms large as a threat to the purity of marriage and the happiness of the offspring. Blake is not the only poet who laments the collapse of humanity in London. Later Wordsworth in his London 1802 wishes Milton were living in that period to redeem England from the deterioration it has undergone. In this century, T.S. Eliot has portrayed the cultural collapse of London as well as the whole world in his The Waste Land. In 'London' Blake attacks the hollowness of society and the helplessness of the Church.LondonSummary: The speaker in the poem 'London' paces through the streets of London and along the streets which stand by River Thames which flows freely. He notices the faces of his fellowmen that pass by him and finds their countenance discoloured by feebleness. He finds in the cries of children and men the replica of men's own sinful deeds. He also notices that men are fettered by the chains they have forged for themselves: it is they who have invented the society which now oppresses them. Nothing, absolutely nothing, has escaped the curse man has brought upon himself. The poet hears the cries of The Chimney Sweepers which appal the helpless Church. The sighs of the dying soldier whose blood drips down the palace walls audible to the poet. At midnight the curses of the young harlots are heard in the streets and this plagues and spoils the holy tie between the wife and husband in their marital life. It becomes also a curse for the young child that is born either from the marriage or from the adultery. In the background we see the shadow of Urizen. His sign is the 'manacles'. Man invented this god in whose name Church and State practise their tyranny and abuses, bringing misery to all.The Church, Society and Man: Many of the poems of Blake are static when each of them is taken as an entity in itself. Whether in "Infant Sorrow or The School Boy' or 'The Garden of Love'. The poet deals with a state of things. In 'Infant Sorrow', for example, the boy is born, as he says, into a dangerous world and it describes its struggle to escape. Therein ends the poem. In 'A Little boy Lost' the boy gives words to his reasonable thoughts and so is burned as a heretic. In 'The Garden of Love' the poet gives us a picture of the Chapel, Garden and tombstones and we derive the symbolic meaning. But in his 'London', though we may take the poem as an isolated specimen, we can sense a progression in terms of both thought and feeling. It moves from the chartered streets to the Thames that flows according to its own 'sweet will' and thereon to the midnight streets. Blake has already given us the critical birth of a 'Londoner' in 'Infant Sorrow'. There the boy is born into a dangerous world and struggles in vain to escape from this world. But eventually, he has come to his full size in this poem where the vices of society welcome him. The poet notices woe and weariness in the faces of the Londoners instead of pleasure and joy. More than an isolated case of London, the poem reveals the reality of society as a whole. The serious and outraged tone of the poem culminates in the exposition of a truth, that harlotry changes the married life into a death carriage. Posterity is cursed by the hereditary sin of adultery and loveless marital relationship. The posterity of London as is shown in Blake's London' hails from or descends from loveless married life and they will become the fallen progeny carrying the sinful burden of their predecessors adulterous and sinful life.The Mind-forged Manacles: In an analysis of the poem. Wolf Mankowitz says: "In this country (England) Blake's 'London' is certainly the principal city. There each street is chartered. clearly defined and, like the chartered Thames limited and confined by its definition. Every face in this London is chartered, marked by the same lack of scope and the same misery and woe because of it." But this chartered quality is not only due to 'social conditions' but, as Blake says,"In every cry of every ManIn every Infant's cry of fearIn every voice. in every banThe mind-forged manacles I hear." Mind-forg'd is the important phrase here. The Earth is chained as much by its own psychological predisposition as by social injustice. The interdependent misery of the inhabitants of this London is most forcefully expressed in the poem's concluding stanza. It is important that the 'harlot' is youthful for it suggests that the new-born infant is itself not so far from the condition of the whore. Her curse is not only what she shouts against society, but the disease she is certain to succumb to. And this disease is not referred to show how dreadful the fate of the harlot is, but because it is effective and destructively so towards the new-born infant's generation 'it is blasted' and the marriages too are infected. Not only symbolically is the marriage car a hearse. The misery of these Londoners is not simply displeasure or discomfort. It is death following disease, disease which cannot be cured because it is neither acknowledged socially nor understood to be fundamental to society's disabilities. The mind-forged manacles are the more effective for not being recognised.London: a Criticism of Society: Blake's tragic appreciation of the restrictions which imprison and kill the living spirit was no purely personal thing. It was his criticism of society and the whole trend of contemporary civilisation. His compassionate heart was outraged and wounded by the sufferings which society inflicts on its humbler members and by the waste of human material which seems indispensable to the efficient operation of rules and laws. In 'London' he gives his own view of that 'chartered liberty' on which his countrymen prided themselves and exposes the indisputable ugly facts. The child Chimney Sweeper, the soldier, the harlot are Blake's types of the oppressed-characteristic victims of a system based not on brotherhood but on fear. Each in his own way shows up the shams on which society thrives. The Chimney Sweeper's condemned life is supported by the churches, the soldier's death is demanded by the court; and the harlot's calling is forced on her by the marriage laws. The contrasts between the truth and pretence, between natural happiness and unnatural repression are stressed by Blake in these three examples, and through them we see the anguish in which he faced the social questions of his time," as C.M. Bowra observes. Rather than a poem of protest 'London' is also a picture of a mental state of the inhabitants of London. The woe and weariness of the dwellers of London strike the note of pessimism. The London society is corrupt. It is the corruption of civilization by the power of Reason whose self-imposed manacles have restricted every spontaneous joy. The street cries of puny chimney sweepers loudly accuse the Church and the death sighs of the soldier stain the State. Love itself the fundamental human virtue - is negated and this negation degenerates the holy marriage bed, the very institution basic to Society-into a blighted hearse. By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on July 17, 2020 • (0) By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on July 12, 2020 • (0) By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on July 4, 2020 • (0) By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 27, 2020 • (0) By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on July 18, 2018 • (14) By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 By NASRULLAH MAMBROL on June 18, 2025 The poem "London" by William Blake, is part of his collection titled "Songs of Experience." Published in 1794, Blake's poetry often explores the social, political, and spiritual issues of his time. "London" reflects his criticism of the harsh conditions and societal problems prevalent in the city during the late 18th century. The poem begins with the speaker wandering through the streets of London, describing them as "charter'd," suggesting that they are constrained or restricted. The mention of the charter'd Thames implies a controlled or commercialized river, emphasizing the pervasive influence of commerce on the city. The speaker observes the people he encounters, noting "marks of weakness, marks of woe" on their faces. This suggests a society burdened by suffering and despair. The repeated use of "charter'd" and the references to cries and manacles evoke a sense of confinement and oppression. The lines about chimney-sweepers, blackening churches, and soldiers' sighs indicate the harsh realities faced by different segments of society. The mention of blood running down palace walls suggests the high cost of power and authority. In the latter part of the poem, the focus shifts to the nighttime streets, where the speaker hears the curses of youthful harlots. The reference to the new-born infant's tear and the plagues on the marriage hearse underscores the destructive impact of social and moral decay on the innocence and purity of individuals. Overall, "London" serves as a powerful critique of the societal issues and injustices Blake observed in the city during his time, using vivid imagery and poignant language to convey his concerns. Key Points William Blake: An English poet, painter, and visionary artist known for his mystical and symbolic works. He lived during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. "London" is a four-stanza poem, with each stanza consisting of four lines (known as quatrains). The poem follows a consistent rhyme scheme of ABAB throughout. The speaker is an observer who walks through the streets of London, witnessing the city's suffering and misery. London: The poem is set in the bustling city of London during the Industrial Revolution. It portrays a grim and oppressive urban landscape. The Oppression of Urban Life: The poem highlights the hardships faced by Londoners due to industrialization, poverty, and societal constraints. The city is depicted as a place marked by weakness, woe, and mental imprisonment ("mind-forg'd manacles"). The cries of men, infants, and other voices echo throughout the cityscape. The Corruption of Childhood: Blake critiques child labor, exploitation, and the loss of innocence. Chimney-sweepers, soldiers, and harlots represent different facets of this corruption. The new-born infants' tears symbolize the bleak future awaiting them. The speaker walks through the streets of London, observing the faces of its inhabitants. Everywhere, they encounter suffering, fear, and oppression. Specific groups (chimney-sweepers, churches, soldiers, harlots) exemplify the city's woes. The poem ends with a powerful image of the marriage hearse plagued by curses and tears. Dark and Critical: The tone is somber, emphasizing the city's misery and societal decay. Blake's use of vivid imagery intensifies the emotional impact. Symbolism: The repeated use of "charter'd" symbolizes control and restriction. Metaphor: "Mind-forg'd manacles" represents mental constraints. Visual Imagery: Blood running down palace walls and harlots cursing evoke powerful mental images. Blake's poem serves as a fierce critique of humankind's failure to build a society based on love, joy, freedom, and communion with God. It calls attention to the suffering of the marginalized, the corruption of innocence, and the moral decay within urban life. William Blake Birth and Background: Born: November 28, 1757, in London, England. Parents: James Blake and Catherine Wright Armitage Blake. His upbringing was modest, and he came from relatively obscure backgrounds. Artistic Endeavors: Engraver and Artist: Blake was not only a poet but also an engraver, printmaker, and painter. Lyric Poems: His exquisite lyric poems include collections like Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794). Profound Works: He created complex "prophecies," such as Visions of the Daughters of Albion, The First Book of Urizen, and Jerusalem. Collaboration with His Wife: Blake worked closely with his devoted wife, Catherine. Together, they etched, printed, colored, stitched, and sold his works. Famous Lyrics: Some of his best-known lyrics today include: "The Lamb" "The Tyger" "London" The "Jerusalem" lyric from Milton, which is akin to a second national anthem in Britain. Legacy and Reception: In the early 21st century, Blake is regarded as the earliest and most original of the Romantic poets. However, during his lifetime, he was often neglected or unfairly dismissed as mad. Themes and Vision: Blake's work aimed to bring about change in both social order and individual minds. His poetry and art challenged conventions and explored profound spiritual and philosophical themes. Word Meaning LineTough WordMeaning in EnglishMeaning in Hindi1wandermove around aimlessly□□□□1charter'dhaving a formal document granting rights or privileges□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□/ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□2Thamesa river flowing through London□□□□□ □□□4woegreat sorrow or grief□□□7bana public announcement or proclamation□□□□8mind-forg'dformed in the mind, not physical□□ □□ □□□ □□□8manacleschain or handcuffs□□□□□9Chimney-sweeperspeople who clean chimneys□□□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□10appallsthreaten/frighten□□□□□ □□□□11haplessunfortunate□□□□□/□□□□□□□□□11sighHeave/breath□□□□/ □□12runs in bloodspreads like blood (here, suggests violence)□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□14Harlotsprostitutes□□□□□14cursean expression of anger or hatred wishing misfortune on someone□□□□16blightsdamages or destroys□□□□ □□□□16plaguescalamity/adversity□□□□□□□□□□16Marriage hearsea horse-drawn carriage used for funerals□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□/ □□□□□ □□□□□ IntroductionLondon is a poem written by William Blake and published in Songs of Experience in 1794. It is one of the few poems in Songs of Experience that does not have a corresponding poem in Songs of Innocence.William Blake was a poet and artist most known for his illuminated works, many of which were religious in nature. He was against organised religion for a variety of reasons, including the Church's refusal to support young people compelled to labour in London. Blake lived and worked in the capital, thus he was presumably in a strong position to write openly about the problems that people faced there.Songs of Innocence and Experience Blake's beautifully illustrated and hand-printed volume of poems, released in 1794, intended to portray the "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" Songs of Innocence is a portion of poetry with a cheerful tone that praises love, infancy, and nature. The poems in Songs of Experience clearly contrast and demonstrate the effects of modern living on people and nature. Blake addresses a variety of themes, including hazardous industrial circumstances, child labour, prostitution, and poverty.The French Revolution In 1789, the French people rose up against the monarch and nobility, violently overturning those in power. Many people considered the French Revolution as a model of how regular, underprivileged people could seize power. Blake alludes to the London revolution, hinting that the experience of living in the city may ignite a revolution on its streets.Short SummaryIn the first stanza, Blake introduced his reader to the narrator as he wanders around the chartered society. A society in which he looks has "marks of woe."In the second stanza, Blake repeatedly uses the terms "single" and "cry" to symbolise the despair that hangs over the entire world in politics and economics.In the third stanza, the "chimney-sweepers lament" symbolises the world seeking to clean the ashes that cause their despair. Blake uses the image of "blackening church" to reflect the loss of innocence and the rejection of religion by the world.The use of soldiers creates a picture of war. The "hapless soldier's sigh" symbolises how men are drawn into the war and have no choice but to represent their country.The last stanza of "London" solves the meaning of the poem. The "youthful harlot's curse" symbolizes how the shameful deeds of the youth will affect the next generation.The poet is shocked to see in his midnight wanderings through the chartered streets of London the poor young girls sell their chastity to earn their daily bread and butter. We are harlots in this sense and lead a miserable life. And they dislike children and dislike love. They don't want to see them born.Summary of LondonWilliam Blake's 1792 poem "London" depicts a civilization in which humanity are confined, abused, and sick.The speaker makes observations as he goes around the streets of London. He detects hopelessness in the emotions of individuals he meets, as well as dread and repression in their words. A soldier's blood stains the external walls of the monarch's home, while the wailing cry of the chimney sweep is a rebuke to the Church. Nothing sounds better at night: the cursing of prostitutes corrupts the unborn infant and taints the "Marriage hearse"Blake opens the poem by discussing the economic system before moving on to the ramifications of selling people in a suffocating exploitation system. The repetition of a word is one method for emphasising its meaning to the maximum extent possible. Blake uses the phrase "charter'd" to describe the Thames Street and River in the first stanza. The name lends the river and roads a juridical vibe, as though they are legally protected and privately owned. Blake then goes on to describe how the people exhibit visible "marks of weakness and woe" which are analogous to bodily signs of grief and distress. In the second stanza, Blake emphasises the word five times. This word gives us a sense of belonging to everyone who is in pain. The report claims that no one in London is immune to exploitation and disease. The words "mind-forg'd manacles" emphasise this notion, representing a society shackled by ideology and the existing quo. Because the stanza itself adheres to the strict iambic tetrameter metre and A-B rhyme pattern, there is no deviation from the norm. The precise adherence to poetic metre in this stanza contrasts sharply with the irregular metre in the third stanza.In the third stanza, Blake mentions a number of societal jobs that are affected by the instability, including the Chimney-sweep, Church, and Soldier. The job titles in the verse are capitalised, making them pronouns and personified. The chimney sweeper is a figure of pity and industrialisation because of the ever-increasing number of filthy chimneys that blacken the entire city with soot. As it strives to deny or gloss over Blake's picture of a harsh smoke-belching economy, the Church's reputation is "black'ning" The metaphor of Soldier's Blood on the Palace Walls depicts not just the mistreatment of soldiers, but also a bad leader of the country who causes a broken community. The third stanza's composition, which no longer adheres to a strict iambic tetrameter metre, exemplifies this disjunction. This broken metre persists until the final stanza, when Blake adopts the enjambment technique to emphasise the "Harlot's curse" and "Infant's tear" It is now dark, and the young Harlot has no way of embracing her infant because it is the result of commerce, not love. She passes on her dissatisfaction to her child, who will undoubtedly pass it on to future generations. She also infects adulterous couples, giving rise to the potent phrase "the Marriage hearse" The marriage hearse is an oxymoron that refers to the idea of a joyous marriage being destroyed by death and disease, culminating in the marriage being a funeral procession for love and freedom. Blake's poem is meant to highlight the need for vision in order to lift London out of its misery and away from economic exploitation.William Blake's poems are examples of poetry that are designed to make a point about how society has deteriorated and that a better alternative must be found. Even though these works were written over sixty years ago, we may still find them relevant today. Although William Blake's poetry has lost most of its shock value in today's culture, we may still be able to identify to the image of mechanisation with the creeping robotic arms spreading terrible infections. If we can feel the poetry's impact in 2011, imagine how much of an impact and shock value the works would have had on their original audiences.FormThe poem is broken into four quatrains, each with alternate rhyming lines. The repetition in the poem is the most apparent stylistic feature, and it serves to emphasise the pervasiveness of the atrocities narrated by the speaker.Questions and AnswersQ. This poem, like "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," was originally published as part of Blake's Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience. Judging from the poem's tone and theme, which book do you think "London" was published in?Ans. "London" was originally considered part of Songs of Experience.Q. Who does the speaker blame for the pain and strife he hears and sees on London's streets?Ans. The speaker points to two different causes for the grief and strife he witnesses: the Church (line ten) and Royalty (line twelve).Q. What is ironic about the poem's final image of "the Marriage hearse"?Ans. The image combines the beauty of love (Marriage) with the sorrow and destruction of death (hearse). The irony lies in that marriage marks the beginning of life together, while a hearse marks the end.Q. What does the repetition of words throughout the poem do to its message?Ans. The repetition that prevails in the poem emphasizes the horrors and evils the speaker observes by making them seem abundantly common.Q. After reading this poem, how would you describe the speaker's attitude toward London?Ans. The speaker presents nothing positive about London. In lines three and four, for instance, he reports that in every face he sees only "Marks of weakness, marks of woe."Q. What does William Blake describe in the poem London?Ans. "London" is one of the best-known poems of a Revolutionary English poet William Blake. The poem describes a journey through the streets of London in which he portrays the negative aspects of that city. In the poem, the city is presented as a pained, oppressive and deprived city. In the city, all that the speaker finds is deprivation and misery. The poem also talks about child labour and slavery. The poem describes the gloomy experiences of the poet during his life in London.Q. What does the poet see in the chartered streets of London?Ans. The poet is surprised to see the poor young girls sell their chastity to earn their daily bread and butter in his midnight wanderings through the chartered streets of London. In this way, they are harlots and live a wretched life. And they dislike children, and they dislike love. They don't want to see them born to them.Q. What is the theme of London by William Blake?Ans. The major theme of the poem "London" is that the city is a gloomy and unhappy place. Things such as "hapless," "weakness," "woe" and "manacles" add to this grim context. Also words such as "the blackening church" and "thro' midnight streets" very clearly represent darkness.Q. What did William Blake think of London?Ans. The poem London shows the true feelings of William Blake regarding the world in which he lived. This is all universal and eternal because every society has limits this imposes on human life. The speaker makes it very clear that he thinks that the government has too much power and that society is too rigid.Q. What is the tone of the poem?Ans. "London" is a poem by British writer William Blake written in 1794. The poem has a bleak, tragic tone and reflects Blake's frustration and unhappiness with his life in London. Blake describes the disquieting socio-economic and moral decline in London and the increasing sense of hopelessness inhabitants.Q. Describe the phrase Marriage hearse used in the final stanza of the poem.Ans. In the final stanza, the phrase "Marriage hearse" is a kind of oxymoron or joining of contrasts. The concept behind this term that a baby is born to a mother who is a prostitute and she curses her newborn infant … So even birth in "London" carries with it the taint of death.Q. Why does William Blake use repetition in London? Ans. Blake uses repetition in London to reinforces his belief that everything is held by the dominant class and that nothing is free of charge. The same constraint occurs in the language itself. The thudding repeat of Blake reflects the city's choquant atmosphere.Q. What type of poem is London?Ans. The poem "London" is composed of four stanzas each consisting of four verses. The lines are written in iambic tetrameter and rhymed ABAB. This means that we may describe the poem as being comprised of four open iambic tetrameter quatrains.Q. What is the imagery of the poem London?Ans. Blake's London is a dark and sombre place. The descriptions establish an image of a dreary city filled with death. Around every corner, the narrator hears screaming, and phrases like "curse," "plagues" and "hearse" conjure up images of death.Q. What are the mind-forged manacles?Ans. The poetic phrase "mind-forged manacles" means anything that restricts us, that inhibits us from moving, that keeps us restrained or the limitations that we set on yourselves in terms of dreams and goals. We do all this because of our mindset or fear. We impose these things in our own minds. In fact, forging is simply the heating and hammering method of metals in order to weld them together. If the manacles are "mind-forg'd", it means that we make them ourselves.Q. What does Chartered mean in London? Ans. The "chartered streets" refers to the commercial management structure, or charters, that existed in the city. The same framework also applies to nature: "the Thames chartered." Blake claims that only the ancient, unburdened river is handled for profit.Q. How does the poet attack three institutions in the poem London explain?Ans. The poet exposes that in the society a young girl was engaged in prostitution who was yet a youth. Overall, the poet has criticized modern society by condemning the church, government, and prevalent dark practices and values that created an unseen veil of misery and suffering in the minds of all. March 22, 2019 August 12, 2023 May 18, 2020 Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. London is one of the grimmest of William Blake's songs of experience (see Songs of Innocence and of Experience. Like "The Tyger" and the "experienced" version of "Holy Thursday," this is one of the comparatively few songs that seem to be written in Blake's own voice. The tone is one of reproach so severe that it defeats even sardonic irony. But it must be kept in mind that such reproach is partial—paradoxically, because it is so total as to affect the speaker himself and to jaundice his own view. Although he can see how terrible the world is, Blake is not exempt from the famous "mind-forg'd manacles" (l. 8) he sees binding everyone everywhere. What are those manacles? They are, first of all, a metaphor for oppression that people could cast off if they wished to. The manacles do not have material reality, although they have material consequences. But because people's minds, as well as their bodies, are enslaved, they are unlikely to cast the off the manacles. Their slavery and oppression goes deeper than material life can reach, although it is a consequence of the materialism and greed of the enslaving interests—the rich and the government. And everyone is enslaved: The speaker sees "marks of weakness, marks of woe" in "every face" he meets (ll. 3–4). The poem's repetitive fury—chartered, mark, every, cry—seems to leave no out at all. Indeed, the poem does not make room for the happiness of innocence that the Songs of Innocence have treated so touchingly. The infants in "London" cry with fear, and the chimney sweepers' cry is one of pain, not simply (as in the "innocence" version of "The Chimney Sweeper") meant as the announcement of their availability. The speaker of "London" may be correct in what he hears in these cries, but that is not the only thing to hear in them. Blake himself declares that poetic vision means seeing beyond the material world, the world of the senses, and not becoming enslaved to the oppression that it shows one everywhere. In his book The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, he has the sublime Satanic figure who represents him ask: "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?" (plate 6). The speaker of "London," then, while accurate, must also be regarded as partial, as himself unable to break his own mind-forged manacles. There is reason for his despair, however. The London he describes is real, and the oppression and misery that it contains ubiquitous. The statesman Edmund Burke, who famously defended what he called "the chartered rights of Englishmen," was violently opposed to the French Revolution (for which Blake had great hopes, as his 1791 prophetic poem The French Revolution attests). Against perfect liberty Burke set the materialistic rights of property, and it was these rights, enshrined in the charters—both the laws and the documents of ownership—that Blake saw as oppressive. The defense of these charters required the courage and blood of soldiers (l. 11) who might otherwise find no way to survive. The churches of London, parts of the established Church of England, supported the government's policies and did so at the expense of the poor; here Blake refers in shorthand to his Chimney Sweeper poems when he writes of how the sweeps' cries appalled the churches that were blackening the children around them (who remove the black soot from the chimneys) with their indifference to the misery of the children and the poor ("London," ll. 9–10). The children—perhaps like the nurse in the "experienced" version of "The Nurse's Song," or perhaps like her charges as she sees them—become harlots even in their youth (l. 14), not only unsympathetic to their own illegitimate children who interfere with the only way they can survive, but to all the infants of the city. Their "curse" is an expression of bitterness, but also a physical state—both sexuality (menstruation, as Harold Bloom argues) and the woes that attend it within the vast hypocrisy of London as well as venereal disease: the plague with which they blight marriage. The "marriage hearse" of the poem's last line interprets what should be a joyful occasion as a deadly one: The groom will transmit to his wife the venereal disease he has become infected with through his consorting with prostitutes, even as he abandons the prostitutes to their own fate. The newlywed couple are going to their graves or are going to procreate children who will repeat the dreadful experience of life in London. The poem's vision of London is bitter and hopeless. But what are we to make of the speaker? In many ways he is an aspect of Blake, in the mode of the biblical prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel whom he so much admired and who blasted the Israelites from the wilderness or the dungheap. Blake makes the connection explicit in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell when he describes a fancy of dining with Isaiah and Ezekiel: "I then asked Ezekiel why he eat dung, & lay so long on his right & left side? he answer'd, 'the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite; this the North American tribes practise, & is he honest who resists his genius or conscience. only for the sake of present ease or gratification?'" The bitterness of tone in "London" is therefore not the last word. Its purpose is to demonstrate the baseness to which humanity has fallen, not in order to promote despair but to provoke change. Thus, Isaiah, the other prophetic denunciator of his people, whom Blake imagines dining with him and Ezekiel, asserts the power and truth of his chastising vision when Blake asks him how he dared to assert he spoke on behalf of God: "I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing, and as I was then perswaded, & remain confirm'd, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote." The important thing to see here is that an assertion of the stark and oppressive limitations of the material world is not the last but the first step toward speaking with the voice of God about the infinite in everything. Those who would charter the city and the river are those who impose weakness and woe everywhere, and those who resist the determinate limitations of the material and financial world are those who can transcend human weakness for the transcendence offered to visionary power, hope, and love. Far from turning their backs on the world, Blake thinks such prophets, among whom he includes himself, will change it. Bibliography Bloom, Harold. Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970. ———. Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976. Damrosch, Leopold. Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980. Erdmann, David V. Blake, Prophet against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977. Fry, Northrop. Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake. 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