

LONDON

by William Blake



The poem "London" belongs to the collection *Songs of Experience* (1794), where Blake gives a corrupt view of the world.



Line 2: "...the charter'd Thames does flow."

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

What are your initial impressions of life in London at this time?

London is one of the few political poems by Blake, since it highlights the moral disease of his times.

In the four stanzas of the poem various evils of London are presented.

Which stanza highlights these evils?

Each of the four stanzas has a precise function.

The third stanza highlights some of the evils which afflict London at the end of the 18th century:

exploitation of children (*Chimney-sweeper*);
pollution (*blackning Church*);
war and destruction (*Soldier's blood*);
political oppression (*the Soldier; the Palace*).

Which stanza explains who the people who suffer from these evils are?

The second stanza explains who the people who suffer from these evils are:
every Man, every Infant (every voice...).

Which stanza reveals how long the suffering of these people lasts?

The fourth stanza reveals how long the suffering of the people lasts:

from "*the new-born Infant*" to the "*hearse*"...

And which stanza defines the setting of the poem? *(Well...I hope you are good enough at Geography!)*

The first stanza defines the setting of the poem:

*"Near where the [...] **Thames** does flow" .*

All the **political, religious and social institutions**, personified by the characters that crowd the English capital, **are criticised in this poem.**

The Chimney sweeper, for instance, represents the **exploitation of children**; the Palace represents **the king and the government**; and the Harlot (a desperate young prostitute) represents **the exploitation of women and a distorted concept of love.**

The **misery** that pervades the city is **both physical and moral**. The word "ban" and the phrase "mind-forg'd manacles" (*lines 7-8*), not only imply political restrictions but also emphasise a wrong attitude towards life.

How do the **sounds** and **colours** which appear in the poem reinforce the feeling of misery that pervades the city?

Let's start with the **sounds**: can you describe them?

- ***Cry*** (*Man, Infant, Chimney-sweeper*): lines 5, 6 and 9.
- ***Sigh*** (*Soldier*): line 11
- ***Curse*** (*Harlot*): line 14

These sounds convey a negative connotation and highlight a miserable human condition.

Let's talk about colours.

Both *The Tyger* and *London* belong to *Songs of Experience*. In *The Tyger* the dominant colours are **black** and **red**.

What are the dominant colours in *London*?

Well... in *London* the **dominant colours** are **BLACK** (the Chimney-sweeper, the blackning Church, midnight, the hearse...) and **RED**.

Question: what is **red** in this poem?

The Soldier's blood, of course! (line 12)

* * *

In conclusion, we can say that the **colours** and **sounds** with which Blake describes the scenes he sees, help reinforce the general atmosphere of suffering of the poem.

A poem about the evil consequences of the Industrial Revolution.