Summary of Poem –

Narrator walks around London, everywhere he goes he sees people in misery and despair. The misery seems unescapable and relentless for young or old. People in power are behind the problems and do nothing to help.

William Blake was a poet and an artist with radical social and political views for the times – he believed in social and racial equality, questioned the church’s teachings and marriage was a form of slavery.

Structure/Language –

Dramatic monologue – first person speaker speaking passionately.
ABAB unbroken rhyme scheme – echo’s the relentless misery and walking sound.
Imagery – deprived people in sounds, in the people and the people in power.
Emotive language – reinforce horror of the situation.
Repetition - emphasises number of people affected.
Sounds – of depression.
Contrast – nothing pure of innocent remains.

Feelings –

Anger – “every black’ning church” and “palace walls” – emotive language and repetition – shows narrators anger at people in power.

Hopelessness – “mind-forged manacles” – people trapped by their own attitudes.

Key Quotes:

“chartered Thames”
– natural features under human control and is also affected.

“Marks of weakness, marks of woe”
– Repetition emphasises bleakness and despair affecting everyone.

“mind-forged manacles”
– People are trapped by thoughts and attitudes.

“infant’s cry of fear”
– Distressing noises – vivid hellish experience.

“chimney-sweepers”
– Emotive language of child labour.

“Black’ning church”
– Corrupt institutions in power, grim visual image of the ugliness caused by the industrial revolution.

“runs in blood down palace walls”
– reference to French revolution, people suffer while rich safe in palace walls.

“youthful harlots curse”
– Prostitutes cursing London, contrast between innocence of youth and prostitution.

“blights with plague”
– emotive language of illness and disease, destructive and uncontrollable.

“marriage hearse”
– oxymoron of marriage a death, marriage death for women due to spread of STDs between men and harlots.

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