

LONDON

- **Context:** William Blake was a radical English poet who regularly explored his views on religion and equality in his work. This poem reflects some of his emotions surrounding society and how people's attitudes and values can drag them down.
- **"Marks of weakness, marks of woe"** - the repetition of the word **"marks"** suggests a permanency to the despair that seems to affect everyone, almost like it is impossible to get rid of. The consonant **"w"** sounds are also repeated, giving the reader a sense of the narrator's bleak and sad life. This gives the poem a hopeless and desperate tone.
- There is no **volta** (turning point) in the narrator's life. The monotony of these everyday **"woes"** and troubles is reflected in the constant and unbroken **ABAB rhyme scheme**, which could also hint at the sound of his feet pacing along the **"chartered street"**. Life continues, whilst the **"mind-forged manacles"** faced by ordinary citizens appears to reinforce the hopelessness, which is a running theme throughout the novel. People appear to be trapped in every way - not just by the things they do, but also by the thoughts in their heads. The phrase **"mind-forged"** however could suggest that these issues are actually made up, with Blake perhaps commenting on our ability to always feel sorry for ourselves.
- **"The youthful harlot's curse"** - this contrast between the innocence of youth and dirtiness of prostitution is stark and uses **emotive language** to make the reader come to a realisation of the reality of London in 1794. The last line also provides an insight into the narrator's mind with **"blights with plagues the marriage hearse"**. The **oxymoron** of **"marriage hearse"** may suggest that even happy events (which often happen in churches, hence this yoking together of ideas) have been tainted by the uncontrollable epidemic of prostitution, which is portrayed as like a **disease**.
- The narrator in "London" uses **bleak metaphors** to portray his **anger** at all forms of power, particularly in the line: **"Every black'ning church"** which could hint at widespread **corruption** throughout our society. The word **"black'ning"** connotes images of **death**, whilst the use of a **"church"** may hint at Blake's own damning opinions on organised religion. Additionally, significant events like marriages and funerals often happen at churches, and the dirty or tarnished image of this whole institution suggests that their reputation has been ruined through corruption. In a more prosaic sense, the **"black"** church may also symbolise the ugliness of the Industrial Revolution,



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