

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

LONDON

London

I wander 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 cry
Every blackening church appals,
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most, through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.

Context:

- **Historical Context:** "London" was written in 1794 and included in William Blake's collection *Songs of Experience*. This period in history was marked by the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, which brought about severe economic disparity, child labour, and urban poverty. The poem reflects Blake's disillusionment with the effects of industrialization and institutional control in society. He also addresses the political climate of the time, including the loss of personal freedoms and the oppression of the poor by the powerful.
 - **Social Context:** London, the city Blake describes, is a place of suffering and misery. The "chartered streets" and "chartered Thames" symbolize how everything, including natural resources, is controlled and commodified. Blake's poem criticizes institutions such as the Church, the monarchy, and the government, all of which he sees as contributing to the oppression and misery of the common people.
 - **Literary Context:** Blake's *Songs of Experience* serves as a counterpoint to his earlier collection *Songs of Innocence*. While *Songs of Innocence* reflects a more idealistic and hopeful outlook, *Songs of Experience* presents a darker view of human nature and society. "London" is a key example of Blake's use of experience to expose the harsh realities of his time.
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Poetic Devices:

1. Imagery:

- Blake uses strong and vivid imagery to depict the suffering and oppression in the city. Examples include:
 - “Marks of weakness, marks of woe” (physical and emotional suffering of people).
 - “Mind-forged manacles” (mental and psychological constraints imposed by society).
 - “Every black’ning church appalls” (corruption and moral decay within the Church).
 - “Runs in blood down palace walls” (the cost of war and violence on society).

2. Symbolism:

- Blake uses symbols to convey deeper meanings:
 - “Chartered street” and “chartered Thames” symbolize control and restriction, showing how even nature and public spaces are being commodified and regulated.
 - “Mind-forged manacles” symbolize psychological control and the limitations placed on individuals by society.
 - “Black’ning church” symbolizes the moral corruption and hypocrisy of religious institutions.

3. Repetition:

- Blake employs repetition to emphasize the extent of suffering and the pervasive nature of oppression in the city:
 - The repeated use of “every” in the second stanza (“In every cry of every man, / In every infant’s cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban”) highlights how suffering affects everyone, regardless of age or gender.

4. Irony:

- The poem contains ironic contrasts:
 - The “marriage hearse” juxtaposes the joy of marriage with the finality of death, suggesting that even love is tainted and corrupted.
 - The idea of a “blackening church” shows the contrast between the supposed purity of religion and its actual corruption.

5. Metaphor:

- The phrase “mind-forged manacles” is a metaphor for the self-imposed limitations on thought and freedom, suggesting that people are enslaved not just physically but also mentally by societal norms and institutions.

6. Alliteration:

- Blake uses alliteration to create a musical rhythm and reinforce the emotional impact:
 - “Marks of weakness, marks of woe” (repetition of the ‘m’ sound).
 - “Mind-forged manacles” (repetition of the ‘m’ sound).

7. Enjambment:

- The poem uses enjambment to create a sense of flow and urgency, reflecting the continuous suffering in London.
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Literary Techniques:

1. **Tone:**
 - The tone of “*London*” is bleak, critical, and despairing. Blake’s disillusionment with society’s institutions is evident, and his tone conveys a sense of hopelessness for the plight of the city’s inhabitants.
2. **Rhyme Scheme:**
 - The poem follows a regular ABAB rhyme scheme in each of its four quatrains. The structured rhyme scheme mirrors the rigid and controlled nature of the society Blake is critiquing.
3. **Structure:**
 - The poem is composed of four quatrains, each with four lines. This rigid structure represents the oppressive and confining nature of London’s society. The regular rhythm and structure can also be seen as mimicking the monotony and routine of the lives of those suffering within the city.
4. **Diction:**
 - Blake’s choice of diction (words like “chartered,” “cry,” “manacles,” “black’ning,” “blood”) conveys a sense of confinement, suffering, and moral corruption. His word choice is deliberately harsh and evocative, creating a sense of suffocation and entrapment.
5. **Juxtaposition:**
 - Blake juxtaposes ideas to create striking contrasts:
 - “Marriage hearse” juxtaposes marriage with death, indicating that even sacred institutions like marriage are infected with corruption and disease.
6. **Personification:**
 - Blake personifies various elements to criticize societal institutions:
 - “Every black’ning church appalls” (the Church is personified as being morally decayed and appalled by the suffering of the people).
 - “The hapless soldier’s sigh / Runs in blood down palace walls” (the sigh of a soldier is given a tangible effect, symbolizing the violence that sustains the power of the monarchy).
7. **Contrast:**
 - Blake contrasts innocence and experience by focusing on the cries of infants and the despair of adults. This contrast illustrates the transition from a state of innocence to one of experience, marked by suffering and loss.
8. **Hyperbole:**
 - The line “How the youthful harlot’s curse / Blasts the new-born infant’s tear” uses hyperbole to stress the impact of corruption and immorality on even the most innocent lives.

COMPARISON WITH LAST DUTCHES

Both “*London*” by William Blake and “*My Last Duchess*” by Robert Browning are critical and evocative poems, yet they differ in themes, tone, and narrative style. Below is a detailed comparison of the two poems, focusing on their context, themes, poetic devices, and literary techniques.

1. Contextual Comparison:

- **"London" by William Blake:**
 - "*London*" was written during the late 18th century, a period marked by the effects of the Industrial Revolution and widespread social injustice. Blake's poem is a critique of the institutional control exerted over the people, reflecting on themes of oppression, poverty, and social decay. The poem speaks against the Church, monarchy, and government, highlighting how they contribute to the suffering of the city's inhabitants.
- **"My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning:**
 - "*My Last Duchess*" was written in the mid-19th century and is a dramatic monologue that reflects on the power dynamics and control within relationships. It is set in Renaissance Italy and tells the story of a Duke who reveals his arrogance and cruelty through his description of a portrait of his late wife. The poem critiques the objectification and oppression of women, revealing the Duke's desire for absolute control and power.

2. Themes:

- **Power and Control:**
 - In "*London*", power is represented by societal and institutional forces that oppress and control the lives of the people. The "chartered streets" and "mind-forged manacles" symbolize the control that the Church, monarchy, and government have over the citizens.
 - In "*My Last Duchess*", power is depicted through the Duke's desire to control his wife. He recounts how he was displeased with her behavior and ultimately hints at having her killed. The poem explores the themes of male dominance, possessiveness, and the objectification of women.
- **Oppression and Suffering:**
 - "*London*" emphasizes the suffering of people as a direct consequence of the institutions' oppression. Words like "cry," "curse," and "weakness" highlight the emotional and physical suffering endured by the inhabitants of London.
 - In "*My Last Duchess*", the Duchess's suffering is more implicit. The Duke's controlling and authoritarian attitude indicates her lack of freedom, leading to her premature death.
- **Morality and Corruption:**
 - Blake's "*London*" critiques the moral corruption of institutions like the Church and monarchy, symbolized by the "black'ning church" and "blood down palace walls."
 - Browning's "*My Last Duchess*" addresses the corruption of power on a personal level, revealing the Duke's moral depravity and lack of empathy.

3. Tone and Mood:

- **"London":**
 - The tone of "*London*" is bleak, critical, and accusatory. Blake's language conveys his disapproval and condemnation of the societal structures that cause misery and despair. The mood is one of hopelessness and sorrow.
- **"My Last Duchess":**

- The tone in “*My Last Duchess*” is calm yet chilling. The Duke’s polite and refined language contrasts with the underlying cruelty and pride in his words, creating a mood of unease and discomfort. The conversational tone enhances the sinister nature of his narrative.

4. Poetic Devices:

- **Imagery:**
 - “*London*” employs strong visual and auditory imagery, such as “cry of every man” and “black’ning church,” to evoke the suffering and corruption in the city.
 - “*My Last Duchess*” uses visual imagery to describe the Duchess’s portrait and her expressions, such as “the depth and passion of its earnest glance.” The imagery reveals the Duke’s obsession with control over her image and behavior.
- **Irony:**
 - “*London*” uses irony to highlight the contrast between the ideals of freedom and the reality of oppression. For example, the phrase “marriage hearse” suggests that even joyous institutions like marriage are corrupted.
 - “*My Last Duchess*” uses dramatic irony extensively. While the Duke speaks of his late wife’s faults, the reader realizes that these faults were merely his perception and not genuine flaws, thereby exposing his controlling nature.
- **Symbolism:**
 - In “*London*”, symbols like “mind-forged manacles” represent the psychological and societal constraints imposed on individuals. The “black’ning church” symbolizes moral decay, and “palace walls” suggest the violence and oppression behind the facade of power.
 - In “*My Last Duchess*”, the portrait of the Duchess is a symbol of the Duke’s desire to control and possess. The curtain that only he can draw symbolizes his need to dominate and limit access to her image, even after her death.
- **Diction:**
 - Blake’s diction in “*London*” is direct and harsh, using words like “cry,” “curse,” and “plagues” to evoke a sense of suffering and injustice.
 - Browning’s diction in “*My Last Duchess*” is refined and sophisticated, reflecting the Duke’s high social status. Words like “countenance” and “earnest glance” add to the formality and decorum of the Duke’s speech, contrasting with his underlying cruelty.

5. Structure and Form:

- **“London”:**
 - “*London*” is composed of four quatrains with a regular ABAB rhyme scheme. The rigidity of the structure mirrors the strict control and oppression within the city. The repetitive rhyme and rhythm create a sense of monotony, reflecting the inescapable cycle of suffering.
- **“My Last Duchess”:**
 - “*My Last Duchess*” is written as a dramatic monologue in rhymed couplets (heroic couplets) with an iambic pentameter. The poem’s form allows the Duke to reveal his character gradually, and the controlled structure parallels his need for control over his wife. The enjambment between lines creates a

conversational flow, while the rhyme scheme reflects his polished and refined demeanor.

6. Narrative Style:

- **"London":**
 - "*London*" has a first-person narrative perspective, which allows Blake to present a personal observation of the city's suffering. The speaker acts as a witness to the suffering and corruption, making the poem's critique more immediate and impactful.
- **"My Last Duchess":**
 - "*My Last Duchess*" is narrated by the Duke in a first-person dramatic monologue. The poem's style allows the Duke to reveal his thoughts and personality indirectly, showcasing his arrogance and cruelty. The monologue format also serves to highlight the power imbalance between the Duke and his audience.

7. Overall Message:

- **"London":**
 - The poem critiques the institutions of power that exploit and oppress the people. It presents a bleak view of society, where suffering is widespread, and control is absolute.
- **"My Last Duchess":**
 - The poem exposes the dangers of unchecked power and control within personal relationships. It serves as a critique of possessiveness, pride, and the objectification of women, revealing the Duke's tyrannical nature.