

# Free essay on london

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The aim of this essay is to present you with a literary analysis of the poem 'London' which is written by William Blake (1757-1827). The poem was written in 1792 and was included in the combined edition titled 'Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience' which was edited in 1794. This is a poem which seems classical in value since it depicts the society of the capital of England in an era which seems to bear numerous traits and characteristics in common with nowadays society.

The end of the 18th century was a period marked by the increasingly worrying gap between social classes due to the increasing number of poor and uneducated people on one hand and the wealthy ones in power on the other.

William Blake himself died without having received any kind of recognition or admiration for his insight to his society and his sensitivity as depicted through his writings as far as the social situation of his era is concerned. Years after his death readers started seeing in his writings the effort of a sensitive voice worrying for the quality of people's lives to raise concern on the need for the establishment of ethical values and principles among members of societies.

London at the time the poem was written was a city characterized by masses of people who suffered extreme conditions of poverty, of children's abuse and exploitation, of women running to prostitution as means of earning their living and managing to survive. Political power of the time was of such a profile that only supported the rights and power of the powerful rich class which seemed to pay no attention to the real problems of their society. It was within this state of social tempest that William Blake started feeling

that he carried this kind of seventh instinct which enabled him to see in the depth the unhappiness covering his era and the future misfortunes which were ready to fall upon people's lives.

In the neighboring country of France people had started working towards the French Revolution which actually arose as an effort of the masses to demand their equality among their society.

'London' is a poem which is an indirect criticism, a very strict one towards the ugliness of the city's life. The poem consists of four (4) stanzas which are written in an AbAb rhyme.

The poet addresses his readers and audience in first person and shares with them his experience and feelings when wandering around the streets of his city. His voice seems so vivid talking to the hearts of his audience. His voice is the voice of a man feeling great pain and distress '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.'

Blake walks around the streets of the city and he sees marks of weakness and woe in every face. The adjective 'charter'd' is used to describe the streets and the river Thames. A deep sarcasm is vivid here since the poet wants to emphasize on the limitation of freedom imposed by the political authorities. Not only the streets are mapped which means that they are totally and exclusively controlled by the political authorities but even the river, the flowing water itself which according to nature flows freely seems to have fallen in the power and control of those in power. And people are all screaming their pain. Even if they are not talking to him, even if their woes are not heard, he sees the marks of pain onto their facial characteristics. The

poet seems to wander around the streets of a place which something like the hell. Only pain, injustice and irrational authority seem to exist wherever his steps take him.

This feeling of the imposition of ruling classes is vivid in the second stanza ' 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.' He does not see, he does not feel anything else but pain and fear. People are afraid to talk about their problem, to share their pain, to work together towards finding a way to lighten their burden.

All people are under this state of being afraid to death. They seem to have just accepted this fate of theirs to live and die within a status of absolute banning and misery.

William Blake goes on walking in the streets and he sees the boy who sweeps the chimney, he sees the Palace and the Church, he sees the soldier. All these figures are once more used by the poet in order to emphasize on the tragic difference and inequality existing between those in authority and the ones suffering exploitation. Where is God? Where is the help that Church as an authority in power ought to provide people with? Why is the Palace standing still and powerful in a moving wave of pain and cries? Why are children exploited and working as slaves when their position ought to be on schools, in warm family environments enjoying the virtues of the innocent childhood? How can a child who is forced to grow and come face to face with the violence and brutality of every day's crucial and strict struggle to survive, turn out to be an innocent soul not infected by the pain and misery?

**‘ How the Chimney-sweeper's cry / Every black'ning  
Church appals; / And the hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in  
blood down Palace walls.’**

These questions remain unanswered. People are forced wither to work from a very early age or service the government and the political power without even daring to think of a different future of their lives. People seem condemned before they are even born. This feeling of the condemned pre - destiny of people living in such a society becomes even more obvious in the last stanza ‘ 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.’

What the poet most hears is the cry of the newborn child. The new born child is crying woe at the moment of his birth because there is only death waiting for him within the borders of this society. And the poet does not refer to physical death. He refers to spiritual death as well. Because as the poem depicts the worst plague of this society is the spiritual death since there is no awakening of people's soul and spirit to fight for a quality in their lives.

Only hypocrisy and exploitation exists. Hypocrisy on behalf of the ones who are supposed to carry a settled life. The poet points his finger to the married men who go to prostitutes to find the satisfaction of their hidden, suppressed passions.

William Blake uses prostitution also metaphorically to talk about the real, deep infection of his society. People die because of the total lack of medical cure. In Blake's era there was syphilis which had spread among the masses of poor people and prostitutes. Like the illness spread to the rich classes of people since married men came in contact with the infected prostitutes, the ‘

disease' of a suffering society went all over people and infected everybody. 'London' is a poem crying and yelling its pain and injustice. People ought to awake their souls and spirits and ought to fight for their freedom and prosperity. But when social structures are infected by lack of education, by the power of materialism and by total lack of social concern, then no hope for real quality life can exist.

Innocence though is not something which is lost upon gaining experience. On the contrary the poet seems to want to highlight that when experience comes then the real hope for genuine innocence can exist. It is as if the poet wants to emphasize that what people need in their lives is not innocence deriving from ignorance but innocence and good will which are based on the knowledge that since the social status -quo is not good then people can really change it and fight evil with their innate innocence.

## **Works Cited**

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