

On the next page is a passage of critical writing focusing on a short poem called "London" by William Blake. The words printed in **bold** are quoted from the poem, but if you look carefully you'll find that sometimes the quotations are inaccurate, and the appropriate punctuation is often missing completely. Your task, of course, is to correct these errors.

I would suggest that you begin by pencilling in any corrections directly on the attached exercise sheet. Then take the sheet home and look up Exercise #7 on the website—you'll find a fresh Word copy there which you can save to your own disk, edit, and then send the polished and perfect copy to me. Please be sure to put your name on the electronic copy—they'll all look the same so I'll have no other way to know one copy from the next. Also, for the purposes of this assignment, you need not include any parenthetical citations to the poem.

Here is a copy of the poem, complete with Blake's quirky spelling and capitalization.

London

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-sweeper's cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse*
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

* The "Harlot's curse" is usually taken as a reference to venereal disease. Men who got the disease by consorting with prostitutes would then pass it along to their wives and, through them, to their children who were sometimes born blind as a result (which explains the following line about the "Infants tear").

Name:

William Blake's "London"

The brief poem "London" from the *Songs of Experience* demonstrates how Blake uses his poetic speakers to exemplify precisely defined states of being. A glance at the opening stanza of the poem offers some insights into Blake's technique: **I wander through each chartered street near where the charter'd Thames does flow, and mark in every face I meet, marks of weakness, marks of woe.** One contrast is immediately evident: the speaker says that he **wanders** through the streets but the streets and the river are both **chartered**, suggesting that they have been straightened and regularized in a grid-like pattern that conflicts with the freedom implied by the speaker's wandering. The speaker is, in other words, a misfit in an overly ordered urban world. But Blake's use of the word **mark** further complicates the issue. In the final line of the stanza, **marks of weakness, marks of woe**, the word clearly refers to distinguishing signs or physical indications of weakness and woe on the faces of persons that the speaker encounters on the streets. In the third line, however, the word **mark** is poised between two contradictory meanings: on the one hand, it could be a synonym of "notice," suggesting that the speaker merely perceives signs that are already present on the faces of the people he meets. On the other hand, the word could be more active, indicating that the speaker unconsciously projects his own ill spirits onto others' faces, much like one might "mark" on a chalkboard. This latter conception would suggest that the unpleasant urban environment is not merely an external "fact," but rather it is at least in part the projection of the speaker's own state of mind.

This second definition of the word **mark** helps to explain what Blake means by the poem's most famous expression, the speaker who hears nothing but his own **mind-forged manacles**. As the poem continues, the speaker describes **how the chimney-sweeper's cry every black'ning church appals** and how the **sigh** of the **hapless soldier** leaves its bloody mark on the **palace walls**. And in the final stanza he claims that **through the midnight streets he hears how the youthful harlot's curse blasts the new born infant's tear**. These are ghastly, sickening images—evidence of a hopelessly hypocritical church and a political power (the **palace**) that cannot feel the agonies of the downtrodden and the weak. Worse yet, the final stanza points to a disease-ridden life that destroys even the finest hopes of love and happiness, carting those hopes off not in a celebratory carriage but in a **marriage hearse**. What is less clear, however, is whether these horrid images are an accurate representation of London or whether they are only the **mind-forged manacles** of the speaker. After all, in one version of the word **mark**, it is the speaker who projects his own spirits onto the "reality" that surrounds him. It could be, then, that the **mind-forged manacles** are the mental chains that lock the speaker into his own dismal condition of Blakean Experience.