Analysis of “London” by William Blake

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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 Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackening Church appalls,
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.
• In the first two stanzas, Blake introduces his reader to the narrator as he “wanders” through the “chartered” society. A society in which he sees has “marks of woe.” Blake repeatedly uses the word “every” and “cry” in the second stanza to symbolize “the depression that hovers over the entire society”. (in economics and in politics)

• In the third stanza, the “chimney-sweeper's cry” symbolizes “the society trying to clean the ashes that causes their state of depression.” Blake uses the religious imagery of the “blackening church” to represent the loss of innocence, and the society's abandonment of religion.
• The use of the soldiers creates an imagery of war. The “hapless soldier's sigh” symbolizes how men are drafted into war and have no choice but to serve their country.
• The fourth stanza of “London” unravels the complex meaning of the poem. The “youthful harlot's curse” symbolizes how the youth's sinful deeds will effect the next generation.
Analysis of Poetry

- Type of Poetry: Narrative Poetry
- Tone of Poetry: Didactic Tone
- Rhyme: a b a b
Rhyme in *London* Poetry

I wander through each chartered street, a
Near where the chartered Thames does flow. b
And mark in every face I meet, a
Marks of weakness, marks of woe. b

In every cry of every Man, c
In every Infants cry of fear, d
In every voice, in every ban, c
The mind-forged manacles I hear. d

How the Chimney-sweepers cry e
Every blackening Church appalls, f
And the hapless soldier’s sigh e
Runs in blood down palace-walls. f

But most, through midnight streets I hear g
How the youthful Harlot’s curse h
Blasts the new-born Infant’s tear g
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse. h
Historical Approach of “London”

• As with most of Blake's poetry, there are several critical interpretations of London. The most common interpretation holds that London is primarily a social protest. A less frequently held view is that of Harold Bloom that London primarily is Blake's response to the tradition of Biblical prophecy.

• The use of the word 'Chartered' is ambiguous and portrays control and ownership. It may express the political and economic control that Blake considered London to be enduring at the time of his writing. Blake's friend Thomas Paine had criticised the granting of Royal Charters to control trade as a form of class oppression. However, 'chartered' could also mean 'freighted', and may refer to the busy or overburdened streets and river, or to the licenced trade carried on within them.
Thank you