**English Romantic Verse** One-Page Guides

**Poet – William Blake**

Poem - London

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Context (biographical, Romantic attitudes, social/historical etc) | "charter'd" is an allusion to Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* which attacks charters as ways for the rich to secure their own rights at the expense of the masses.  "mind forg'd manacles" are made by ourselves to restrict ourselves. Romantics wanted to open peoples' minds and free them from what they saw as the chains of societal institutions.  E.g. marriage (the "marriage hearse" and institutionalised religion ("black'ning church")  "New born infant's tear" represents Romantic ideas on the nature of childhood.  Children are born innocent - The infant is already crying when he is born as his innocence is already tarnished once he experiences London  Nature is a teacher - children grow up in London to be the same as their parents as they haven't experienced nature to be taught properly  Your environment shapes who you are |
| A poem about… (Interpretations, key Romantic themes, nature, mortality) | Restriction  City vs Nature  Childhood  Marriage/love  Death |
| Speaker (who? talking to whom? attitude to subject- ironic, reverent etc) | Blakean persona – speaker is a (probably adult) figure walking around London and telling the reader about the awful things he sees and his opinion on the |
| Form (sonnet, ballad, verse form, rhyme and rhythm) | 4 stanzas of 4 lines with relatively equal line lengths - looks neat and pretty from the outside which attempts to conceal the dirty reality.  Formulaic and artificial represents restriction  Heavy rhythm in the iambic structure of the first lines - "I **wan**der **thro**' each **char**ter'd **street**" - provides a regular beat reflecting the unrelenting rhythm of the city. It is unstoppable and unavoidable, contrasting the word "wander" in the first line as you cannot walk freely when the city (like this strong rhythm) constrains and is contrained  Regular ABAB rhyme scheme is restrictive and confining |
| Overall structure (shifts, changes, climax of narrative etc) | Continuous structure – no major shifts in attitude or approach, though in the last stanza, emphasised by the word “but”, Blake zooms in on the “youthful harlot” and “infant’s tear”, saying that this is what he notices most. |
| Language (vocabulary - heightened or demotic; rhetorical features etc) | Streets are described as "charter'd" suggesting restriction and limitation imposed by social institutions. Blake originally wrote "dirty streets" but changed it to "charter'd"  A charter is a document that defines the rights of the rights, restrictions and functions of a group.  Suggests that restriction is worse than dirt |
| Sound effects (harsh and soft, onomatopoeia etc) | "mind-forg'd manacles" - blunt m and d sounds suggest heaviness and restriction. |
| Imagery (metaphor, simile, images etc) | "Youthful Harlot's curse" - youthful innocence is corrupted by the moral and physical degradation of the city  "Curse" contrasts with the "cry" of the infant  Harlot is capitalised, suggesting that it is her name and has become her whole identity  "marriage hearse" - marriage is associated with death. Romantics believed in freer love  The Church "appals" at suffering but does little to help.  "Church" is capitalised, suggesting Blake is writing about the organised church as a whole institution rather than a specific church building.  The church is "black'ning" from smog and moral faults  Streets are in "midnight" because they are made darker by the restriction of London and the destruction people are forced into |
| Patterns of language (semantic fields, repetitions, oppositions) | "Mark" repeated in Stanza 1  Used both as 'mark what I say' and a mark of dirt or pain.  "Cry" repeated throughout the poem  Suggests that all the people in London are all crying out for help. Gives the poem a tone of desperation  Repetition shows how even the language is being restricted as it is forced into a very limited pattern of words and phrases  ‘marriage hearse’ – interesting oxymoron suggesting, perhaps, the deathly institution of marriage (particularly in Blake’s time); all these institutions constrain people and promote corruption |
| Punctuation and grammar (sentence length, end-stopping, caesura, verb mood - imperative, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory) | Stanzas are all end stopped and the lines are all very short, showing restriction.  Imperative verbs – “mark” |
| Links to other poems | Holy Thursday – Innocence: two different interpretations of the lives of people in the city of London  Sonnet on the Sea – contrast between nature and city  Representations of the city in ‘Tintern Abbey’  ‘Lines Written in Early Spring’ – similar cry against what humans have done to each other  Keats’ poems relating to pain and suffering |