

William Blake (1757-1827)

London - A very unusual description of London, its streets and the river, which tell a story of oppression and of both public and private degradation.

I wander¹ thro' each charter'd² street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark³ in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe⁴.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban⁵,
The mind-forg'd manacles⁶ I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers⁷ cry
Every black'ning⁸ Church appalls⁹,
And the hapless¹⁰ Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace¹¹ walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts¹³ the new-born Infant's tear
And blights¹⁴ with plagues¹⁵ the Marriage hearse¹⁶.
(Songs of Experience)

W. Wordsworth (1770- 1850) - Sept. 3, 1802
Upon Westminster Bridge

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth like a garment wear

The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky,
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!

The river glideth at his own sweet will:

Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

William Wordsworth - London Images The Prelude , Book 7

A Swarm of Slaves

Oh, blank confusion! and a type not false
Of what the mighty City is itself
To all except a straggler here and there,
To the whole swarm of its inhabitants;
An undistinguishable world to men,
The slaves unrespected of low pursuits,
Living amid the same perpetual flow
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end—
Oppression, under which even highest minds
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free.

George Gordon Byron (1788-1824)

London

A mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping,
Dirty and dusky, but as wide as eye
Could reach, with here and there a sail just skipping
In sight, then lost amidst the forestry
Of masts; a wilderness of steeples peeping
On tiptoe through their seal-coal canopy
A huge, dun cupola, like a foolscap crown
On a fool's head- and there is LondonTown.
(Don Juan, canto X, stanza 82)

Charles Dickens (1821 – 1970) - Oliver Twist - Chapter 50

The pursuit and escape – Slums

Near to that part of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are dirtiest and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers and the smoke of close-built low-roofed houses, there exists the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.
To reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of waterside people, and devoted to the traffic they may be supposed to occasion. The cheapest and least delicate provisions are heaped in the shops; the coarsest and commonest articles of wearing apparel dangle at the salesman's door, and stream from the house-parapet and windows. jostling with unemployed labourers of the lowest class, ballast-heavers,

coal-whippers, brazen women, ragged children, and the raff and refuse of the river, he makes his way with difficulty along, assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys which branch off on the right and left, and deafened by the clash of ponderous waggons that bear great piles of merchandise from the stacks of warehouses that rise from every corner. Arriving, at length, in streets remoter and less-frequented than those through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.

T. S. Eliot (1888 – 1965) - The Waste Land (1922)

Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying “Stetson!
You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
Oh keep the Dog far hence, that’s friend to men,
Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again!
You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!”