

## **Why, according to Johnson, does Thales bid farewell to London?**

Thales bids farewell to London because it is filled with vice, corruption, and crime. London is home to villains, poverty, and injustice. Thales leaves to seek virtue, peace, and safety.

In the poem "London" by Samuel Johnson, the speaker stands beside his friend Thales who is getting ready to leave the city to move to the country and "breathe in distant fields a purer air." Thales has good reasons for bidding farewell to London. It is filled with crime and corruption. Commerce abounds, but so does cheating. Vice is everywhere in the city. Learning is highly undervalued. Thales wants to live in a "happier place / Where honesty and sense are no disgrace." He wants to be in the midst of nature rather than the stinking filth of the city, and he longs for safety and peace. He wants to truly learn to live.

As the poem continues, Thales does, too, lamenting the corrupt politics, greed, and unscrupulous dealings of the city. There are plenty of deceivers around, too, who "with softer smiles, and subtler art, / Can sap the principles, or taint the heart" and lead people astray. London has become the home of villains and their folly, of injustice and absurdity, of tortured poverty and people who care nothing about the welfare of others. London is focused on power and wealth, at least on the surface, but beneath that surface lies starvation and homelessness. It is a place that can kill a person, both spiritually and physically.

Therefore, Thales is fleeing London, for he is tired "with follies and with crimes," and he is going to seek virtue and peace.

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### **Themes of the poem London**

#### **a. Poverty and Violence**

In Samuel Johnson's poem "London," the speaker claims that London is a dangerous place for the average citizen. His friend Thales agrees, believing that London has become so full of crime and violence that he no longer feels safe walking through its streets. As a result of economic inequality and a crumbling public infrastructure, crime rates have risen, including violent crimes

such as murder. Even most of the buildings are unsafe, for “falling houses thunder on your head”; it wasn’t uncommon during Johnson’s day for entire buildings to collapse due to poor construction.

Both Thales and the poem’s speaker agree that the violence plaguing the city of London is not limited to the denizens of the streets. Much of it comes from the city’s wealthy elite, such as “the fell attorney [who] prowls for prey” or politicians who “devote [themselves] to Vice and Gain.” By hoarding and lavishly spending so much wealth that could be used to help the poor, the elite classes create an atmosphere of desperation in which the poor must resort to lives of crime in order to survive.

### **The Corruption of Education**

Thales argues that the status of education in London is deplorable. He claims that “unrewarded Science toils in vain,” indicating that the city no longer prioritizes education and higher learning. The intelligentsia (of which Johnson was a member) is unrecognized and undervalued. Moreover, the scholarly class is either unable or unwilling to use their knowledge to help the city’s poor or reform its broken social systems, rendering their work useless and unhelpful. In another instance, the speaker complains about how often in the city “a female atheist talks you dead,” as if philosophers have become as predatory and harmful as the “ruffians” or “fell attorneys” who prey on the weak and unsuspecting. As both Thales and the speaker see it, the corruption of the city has infected every level of society, including the well-educated.

### **What is the significance of the epigraph to "London" by Samuel Johnson?**

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The epigraph of "London" by Samuel Johnson is a quotation from Juvenal whose "Third Satire" Johnson imitates. The quotation sets the theme and tone for "London" by asking two questions that the speaker proceeds to answer in detail.

The epigraph at the beginning of Samuel Johnson's poem "London" is a quotation from the Roman poet Juvenal. It reads, "Quis ineptae / Tam patiens urbis, tam ferreus ut teneat se?" Translated, this is, "Who can endure this monstrous city? Who is so iron-willed he can bear it?" This set of questions sets the tone and the theme for the entire poem.

The speaker would likely answer these questions with a firm "No one!" This is why he is leaving London. He can no longer endure its filth and poverty, its crime and corruption. It is filled with decay and malice, appalling ideas and contempt. The speaker wants to "find some happier place" where there is honesty and peace, a quiet rest in nature, and room to think clearly and relax. London is no longer that place, and the speaker lacks the iron will that can bear the monstrous city.

Further, Johnson composes his poem in imitation of Juvenal's "Third Satire," so it is fitting that his epigraph is a quote from that poet. Johnson wants to capture the corruption of London through the tool of satire, the use of irony, ridicule, exaggeration, and humor to critique the folly and degradation of human life and society.

Johnson actually goes even further in his satire than Juvenal, for Johnson includes politics in his poem. He alludes to such contemporary matters as pensions, licensing laws, and the abuses of the ruling government as part of his rant. These things contribute to the horrors of the monstrous city, and the speaker cannot wait to get away from them all.

### **Discuss Johnson's "London" as a critique of mercantile expansion.**

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Johnson's poem "London" represents a critique of mercantile expansion. The poet describes the rise of London as a result of commercial enterprise and the reality that it brings with it. Johnson's description is reflective of the corruption, vice, and suffering that are inevitable by-products of mercantilist expansion. As a result, his poem represents an argument for why one should leave London and return to nature to pursue more virtuous pursuits.

The elements of London that Johnson brings out in his poem are reflective of the rise of commerce. The London that Johnson describes is not quaint and small. Rather, it is the realization of mercantilist expansion and commercial enterprise. For Johnson, the metropolis of London is a reminder that with mercantile expansion comes realities that cause one to inevitably mourn.

Thales's reasons for leaving London represent the logical extensions of mercantilist expansion. The vision of London from which Thales departs is a reality where mercantilist expansion and economic progress have supplanted human connection and values:

There none are swept by sudden Fate away,  
But all whom Hunger spares, with Age decay:  
Here Malice, Rapine, Accident, conspire,  
And now a Rabble Rages, now a Fire;  
Their Ambush here relentless Ruffians lay,  
And here the fell Attorney prowls for Prey;  
Here falling Houses thunder on your Head,  
And here a female Atheist talks you dead.

The collusion between elements like "Malice, Rapine" and "Accident" are realities of mercantilist expansion. The predatory nature of commercial expansion is evident in the "Attorney" who "prowls for Prey." The overcrowding that is intrinsic to mercantilist growth is evident the "falling Houses" that "thunder on your head." The worship of wealth as the only religion has supplanted the divine, and Johnson points to this reality reflected in the rise of atheism. There is little in way of "dissipated wealth," rather it is consolidated in the hands of the few at the costs of the many.

The condition of England's glorious past is something that Johnson argues had given way to the realities of commercial growth. The present that Thales sees is one where mercantile expansion lies at the heart of everything in modern England:

Behold her Cross triumphant on the Main,  
The Guard of Commerce, and the Dread of *Spain*,

Ere Masquerades debauch'd, Excise oppress'd,  
Or *English* Honour grew a standing Jest.

The "jest" is that there could be anything other than "the Guard of Commerce" in modern England and in London, in particular. The world of London is one where all actions are based upon the desire to expand economic frames of reference through devotion to "Vice and Gain." The honorable individual stands no chance of success in a world where material profit and mercantile expansion dominates over all. In the end, Johnson's poem represents why the individual has little other choice but to retire to a realm away from the terrors of mercantilist expansion and the corruption within material pursuits of the good.

### **When was '*London*' written?**

The poem '*London*' was written in 1738. It was published in May 1738 anonymously.

### **What kind of poem is '*London*' by Samuel Johnson?**

Johnson's '*London*' is a satire on the ruling government and contemporary culture of the city dwellers. The government was not doing its work properly. Instead of serving the people, it was serving itself. Johnson wrote this piece in imitation of Juvenal's Third Satire.

### **What is the main theme of '*London*'?**

Corruption and hypocrisy in London is the central theme of the poem. The politicians take advantage of the people and plunder all their money. It is because of corruption the people are facing a lot of problems.

### **What is the name of the speaker's friend in '*London*'? Why does he decide to leave London?**

The narrator's friend Thales is the speaker of the poem. He cannot bear the corruption and the vices of people, so he decides to leave London.

### **What is Thales's advice to the rulers and common people?**

Thales urges the common people not to bear the corruption and follow the selfish rulers. He advises the rulers that they should serve their people and their own country instead of making pro-government policies.

**What kind of people live in the city of London?**

There are a lot of robbers in the city of London. Ruffians, who dwell in the city, can kill an innocent at any time. There are also some people on whom the corruption and these ruffians have no affect. They are the favorites of the rulers and blindly follow their policies without even questioning them.