

LONDON IN LITERATURE

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London in William Blake's eyes and London in James Thompson's eyes

I have decided to try to compare a William Blake's poem London, which was published in 1794, and a poem The city of dreadful night written almost one hundred year later by James Thompson. Both poems have common the melancholic and depressing mood flowing from the time in which the authors lived. Authors described the city as hellish place where all citizens are suffering and threatened. One can obviously feel the pessimism everywhere, in streets, houses etc.

Blake lived in 18th century, which was a period of rapid growth of London connecting with the beginning of industrial revolution and increasing population. The streets were overcrowded so there were great conditions for crimes and prostitution. But it was very quickly stopped by the police with hard penalties and the death penalty menaced for fairly minor crimes.

People were threatened "marks of weakness, marks of woe" these words introduce the poem. There are voices who are crying. Blake tells about crying children, soldiers and also chimney sweepers. Chimney sweepers symbolised black colour as well as blackning church. Black colour was always and still is connected with death. Death caused by venereal diseases was a big social problem in London in those days. Blake adverts to dying prostitutes but also dying children, which made people more and more desperate. Even if there were "Blasts the new – born Infant's tear" London was again cursed with plague. People saw no future. "Runs in blood down Palace walls". There was the only hope - the fall of government, hope

that something new can happen. Blake pointed to the example in Europe, where started French Revolution, which could show people a new way.

Although "The City of Dreadful Night" was written almost one hundred years later than "London" we can see that the conditions for the citizens had not still changed. People were poor and unhappy. They worked sometimes more than 16 hours a day and it was normal that small children did so. These pictures we know from the novels of Charles Dickens, who lived in 19th century too.

The poem shows the author's feelings and despair. It seems as though he lost his faith in better live and he is full of emptiness - "Faith and hopes are dead". He passes by the London's night. He is alone. But still there are ideas of collectivity. Values as a "fellowship" or "fraternity". He knows that he is not the only one suffering. Going, he thinks about the night and day. He has a feeling that the sun never shines in this city, which symbolised the social darkness. But it is also connected with smog. Due to the importance of London and United Kingdom generally, there was a big increase of factories those days. In the poem there is mentioned death again, which is the only people's certitude.

In spite of the fact that United Kingdom in 18th and 19th century was one of the most powerful and the richest country in the world its capitol was full of poor people suffering from deseases, living in terrible conditions in overcrowded slums. Both authors described this situation in very depressive and melancholy way not mentioning some positive aspects of life. Blake describes even born of baby such as very pessimistic moment because he see the reality of poverty and despair live. They described London as an urban space not suitable for living. But in my opinion Blake's poem has bigger hope or faith in future expressed by the thought of fall of government unlike Thompson's poem in which I didn't find any hope. And as he writes

nobody can't understand this emptiness and desperation without trying to live in London in those days.