

Petr Crhonek

Professor Věra Eliášová

London in Literature

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London as a sad environment in Blake and Mansfield

William Blake and Katherine Mansfield are authors who were writing about London. Their London was an environment for its inhabitants. In Blake's poem, London is described as a very sad place which has no future. Mansfield wrote that London is sad only for poor people, because they have not enough money. There are both similarities and differences.

Blake wrote his poem at the end of the 18th century – it is more than one hundred years earlier than Mansfield. I consider his description of London to be very sad and pessimistic, because he repeats the word “cry”. He wrote “in every cry of every man” (Blake) which can mean that there are only sad people in London. People are crying because someone is dying as he describes “and the hapless Soldier's sigh.” (Blake) Death is a sad event, during which people are crying. Why was he so pessimistic? In those times London was full of people who were living in poor conditions, there was no sewerage system – thanks to the bad hygiene people were getting ill and dying. This may be the reason why he wrote such a sad poem.

On the other hand, Mansfield is rather optimistic. She wrote a story about a girl who is working in a shop selling hats. One day a rich man with his girlfriend come into the shop. The girl wants to buy a hat. The shop-assistant called Rosabela shows her one hat, which the girl loves. She finally buys it. But Rosabel starts to dream of him. She images how he is having a dinner with her and is taking care of her. At the end she realizes that it was just a dream. Why is she dreaming if the man?

She is dreaming of him, because she is lonely and poor girl who is only working without having a fun. She is commuting to the shop by a bus and during her journey she can

see advertisements for different products which she probably cannot afford to buy. She is also watching the shops on the streets, for example jewellers' shops. But the man has enough money and is buying things for his girlfriend. If Rosabel was his girlfriend, he would things for her. If she was with him, London would be happier place for living.

As we can see these two works are similar, because they express sadness of the main heroes. On the contrary, the reasons are different. Blake is sad because people are dying or crying, Rosabel is sad because she doesn't have fun, she is not buying things she wants and because of having no boyfriend.

If we compare these two ways of expressing sadness, we will conclude that Blake's sadness is much worse. He isn't expressing any kind of hope since he says "how the youthful Harlot's curse blasts the new-born infant's tear, and blights with plagues the Marriage hearse." (Blake) This means that prostitutes are giving birth to children. These children are ill with a plague. People cannot hope for better future when children are dying. Nevertheless, Rosabel is expressing some kind of hope because she is dreaming of better future. This future may never happen, but still there is hope. She is not afraid of death or an illness. She is afraid of being alone.

There is another difference which has to be mentioned – London itself. In Blake's poem it is a dreadful place where people are scared. In Mansfield's story, London is happier, but only for the rich people who have enough money. So there are two kinds of London – one is for the poor, the other one is for the rich.

I have come to the conclusion that these authors have different opinions on London. Blake saw London as a whole, but Mansfield saw it as two worlds. Blake was sad and maybe even desperate because of the dying people, since death is very emotive. Rosabel was sad because of her unfulfilled desire for love. The reasons changed because the society changed as well. Anyway, these two pieces of art are providing us with different situations in London.