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City of Darkness vs City of Light – The Significance of Light in the Modern Metropolis with Dickens and Dos Passos

Abstract: This paper examines the literary representations of two metropolises – London and New York with Dickens and Dos Passos respectively. It aims to establish the significance of light in the portrayal of modern cityscapes with these two writers by comparing and contrasting the two depictions. In doing so, it avoids simplifying the matter by abstaining from a historicist analysis, which would establish differences based on technical progress, rendering one city more illuminated than the other. Instead, it determines the role of light as a factor in its own right in the two analyzed urban representations revelatory of an evolution of modernity – from Modernity to Modernism. The comparison is effectuated by analyzing passages from Dickens's and Dos Passos's urban representations, the aim being to establish Dickens's position in the transitional period of modernity on the premise that Dos Passos is generally considered to be representative of high modernism and Dickens - occupying a central place in the Victorian Age.

Key words: modernity; modernism; light; city; metropolis; urban; representation; expressionist; space

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