

## IN 'A LONDON THOROUGHFARE. 2 A.M.' HOW DOES THE POET PRESENT THE SPEAKER'S FEELINGS ABOUT THE CITY AT NIGHT?

Lowell clearly establishes that the speaker's feelings about the city at night evoke a sense of loneliness as there is a prevalent theme of isolation throughout the poem. The writer describes "lamps", connoting warmth and light, as "cold" suggestive that the city at night loses all its warmth and comfort- instead becoming a place which is unwelcoming and makes you feel isolated. This theme of isolation is exacerbated in the last line where the speaker brands it as an "alien sky". The extra-terrestrial imagery showcases how she feels that the city at night is something undetectable and unearthly- the speaker is familiar with the "moon", another source of light and comfort, but feels isolated by this city in the "plum coloured night". As this is the last sentence in the poem, Lowell is reinforcing to the reader that the city at night holds a bleak darkness that not even the abundance of "lamps" can cut through. Thus, creating a lingering atmosphere of loneliness and isolation at the end of the poem.

Moreover, Lowell presents a sense of hopelessness regarding the speaker's feelings about the city at night. There is a semantic field of light that permeates the poem with the repeated motif of "lamps" and the "moon". In the first stanza, the speaker uses repetition on "lamps", highlighting her dismay at how there is only this unnatural light that is filling the "watered" streets of London. This sense of hopelessness is compounded through the diction "barred" regarding the "slow-moving river", creating an image of restriction. This alluding to how hopelessness pervades London as the speaker feels the city restricts all-natural matter and tries to illuminate its darkness through unnatural means. The end stops that litter the poem reinforces this hopeless stagnancy in London. Lowell makes each line end with an end stop to reinforce to the reader that nothing naturally flows in London at night- each street is filled with "cabs", "tramps" and "squalid". Therefore, Lowell presents the speaker's feelings as scathing of this bleak unnatural city and emphasises its hopelessness.

Lastly, Lowell utilises irregular stanza lengths to convey how the speaker feels that London is full of chaos and disorder with no sense of togetherness. The first stanza is the longest out of the 3, as it is describing the events that are unfolding within London, it is emulating the chaos that ensues on the streets of London- there is no sense of order or unity as everybody is embarking on their journeys, unphased by the "sinister" streets. Significantly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza, describing nature and the moon, are shorter as Lowell wants to emphasise how the speaker feels that nature has been abandoned and dismissed compared to the hollow city. Alternatively, the miniscule amount of rhyme on "night" and "bright" could showcase how there is some sense of togetherness amongst the chaos. Yet, as there are only two examples of rhyme throughout the entire poem, Lowell is suggestive that the speaker feels that the city at night consumes anything natural and innocent. Lowell utilises this bleak presentation to perhaps make her reader question the more dark and "sinister" natures of glorified cities.

**EXTRACT****A London Thoroughfare\*. 2 A.M.**

They have watered the street,  
It shines in the glare of lamps,  
Cold, white lamps,  
And lies  
5 Like a slow-moving river,  
Barred with silver and black.  
Cabs go down it,  
One,  
And then another.  
10 Between them I hear the shuffling of feet.  
Tramps doze on the window-ledges,  
Night-walkers pass along the sidewalks.  
The city is squalid and sinister,  
With the silver-barred street in the midst,  
15 Slow-moving,  
A river leading nowhere.

Opposite my window,  
The moon cuts,  
Clear and round,  
20 Through the plum-coloured night.  
She cannot light the city;  
It is too bright.  
It has white lamps,  
And glitters coldly.

25 I stand in the window and watch the moon.  
She is thin and lustreless,  
But I love her.  
I know the moon,  
And this is an alien city.

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**[24 marks]****A04 [4 marks]**

IN BOTH 'NOVEMBER NIGHT, EDINBURGH' AND 'A LONDON THOROUGHFARE. 2 A.M.' THE SPEAKERS DESCRIBE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CITY AT NIGHT.

WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES AND/OR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE METHODS THE POETS USE TO PRESENT THESE ATTITUDES?

In both poems, the poets explore the attitudes towards the city through a theme of hostility- both present their cities as hostile and unwelcoming in the darkness. In 'A London thoroughfare', Lowell highlights the darkness that pervades London, especially highlighting that at night the "sinister" part of the city prevails. This is akin to MacCaig in "November Night" where he speaks about how the "darkness swirls" and the weather appears hostile as "the frost" went into his "lungs".

However, both poets use a juxtaposing semantic field to explore their attitudes. In 'November night', there is a semantic field of extreme cold as there is "ice" in the "winter raw" causing "frost" in his lungs. This suggests that the bitter cold is prevalent throughout "November Nights" in "Edinburgh", as the semantic field is throughout the whole text it mimics how the cold is relentless. However, Lowell uses a semantic field of 'light' as she describes the light from "lamps" contrasting the "light" from the "moon". This showcases how Lowell is scathing of the unnatural light of the city that the natural light from the moon cannot compete with.

Lastly, in a "London thoroughfare" the stanzas are irregular, juxtaposing the regular quatrains in "November nights". Lowell utilises irregular stanzas to highlight the chaos, irregularity, and impersonal aspect there is to London at night- there is no warmth from natural light. Contrastingly, MacCaig uses quatrains to show the reader the regularity and relentlessness of these bitter nights that plague "November".

**EXTRACT****November Night, Edinburgh**

The night tinkles like ice in glasses.  
Leaves are glued to the pavement with frost.  
The brown air fumes at the shop windows,  
Tries the doors, and sidles past.

5 I gulp down winter raw. The heady  
Darkness swirls with tenements\*.  
In a brown fuzz of cottonwool  
Lamps fade up crags, die into pits.

Frost in my lungs is harsh as leaves  
10 Scraped up on paths. – I look up, there,  
A high roof sails, at the mast-head  
Fluttering a grey and ragged star.

The world's a bear shrugged in his den.  
It's snug and close in the snoring night.  
15 And outside like chrysanthemums\*  
The fog unfolds its bitter scent.

\*tenements: blocks of flats

\*chrysanthemums: a type of flower