

The city and its milieu have always been a source of inspiration and motifs for artists and writers are no exception. The process of urbanization brought along rapid social, political, cultural and economic changes which evoked immediate responses of various kinds, from welcoming and celebrating ones to those of rejection and condemnation, from those who were traditionally the most sensitive about such phenomena ~ men of letters. As a result of this fact, the image of the city has been present in literature since the first urban societies appeared and to trace it back in detail would mean a different aim from that which this work is going to follow.

The main concern of my thesis is contemporary British literature and therefore I would like to focus on how the city is reflected in the works of British writers in the last two decades of the twentieth century. To provide certain general coherence, continuity and context of the theme, I will also put down a brief outline of how the image of the city has been developing and changing in English literature since the late Victorian period trying to show that the phenomenon is very deep-rooted in the tradition of the English imagination.

If we should mention the most notable contemporary British writers whose works are set in cities or in some other way depict the urban environment, these would undoubtedly include Martin Amis, Ian McEwan and Peter Ackroyd. It is obvious that Ackroyd differs from both Amis and McEwan at least as far as the subject matter of his novels is concerned, since the London of his fictional world is the historical London of Sir Christopher Wren, George Gissing or Karl Marx, though even as such it must be understood as a truly literary device of the postmodern poetics. Therefore, I decided to deal with the first two novelists and to reduce the image of the city to that which is either contemporary or both contemporary and allegorical.