

### **Dorothy Wordsworth on a London morning**

It was a beautiful morning. The city, St Paul's, with the river, and a multitude of little boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not overhung by their cloud of smoke, and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a fierce light; that there was something like the purity of one of nature's own grand spectacles.

From the *Journal*, 31st July 1802

### **William Wordsworth: *Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802***

Earth hath not anything to show more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty:  
This City now doth, like a garment, wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep  
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;  
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;  
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

### **Lord Alfred Douglas: *Impression de Nuit: London* (1909)**

See what a mass of gems the city wears  
Upon her broad live bosom! row on row  
Rubies and emeralds and amethysts glow.  
See! that huge circle like a necklace, stares  
With thousands of bold eyes to heaven, and dares  
The golden stars to dim the lamps below,  
And in the mirror of the mire I know  
The moon has left her image unawares.  
That's the great town at night: I see her breasts,  
Pricked out with lamps they stand like  
huge black towers.  
I think they move! I hear her panting breath.  
And that's her head where the tiara rests.  
And in her brain, through lanes as dark as death,  
Men creep like thoughts... The lamps are like  
pale flowers.

### **Oscar Wilde on dawn in London**

Where he went he hardly knew. He had a dim memory of wandering through a labyrinth of sordid houses, of being lost in a giant web of sombre streets, and it was bright dawn when he found himself at last in Piccadilly Circus. As he strolled home towards Belgrave Square, he met the great waggons on their way to Covent Garden. The white-smocked carters, with their pleasant sunburnt faces and coarse curly hair,

regular visitors at Don Saltero's coffee-house in its earliest days. The place was one of the exhibitions which Benjamin Franklin went to see when working as a journeyman printer in London; and it is on record how that after leaving the house one day he swam from Chelsea to Blackfriars, performing sundry feats in the water as he went along.

From *Old and New London*, 1878

**Louise Imogen Guiney: *In the Reading-Room of the British Museum***

Praised be the moon of books! that doth above  
 A world of men, the fallen Past behold,  
 And fill the spaces else so void and cold  
 To make a very heaven again thereof;  
 As when the sun is set behind a grove,  
 And faintly unto nether ether rolled,  
 All night his whiter image and his mould  
 Grows beautiful with looking on her love.

Thou therefore, moon of so divine a ray,  
 Lend to our steps both fortitude and light!  
 Feebly along a venerable way  
 They climb the infinite, or perish quite;  
 Nothing are days and deeds to such as they,  
 While in this liberal house thy face is bright.

## THE LITERARY LIFE

Many writers are forced to work at humdrum jobs in order to support themselves and their writing. The novelist Anthony Trollope (1815–82) endured boredom, humiliation and embarrassment in the Colonel-Secretary's office of the Post Office in London. He describes with beautifully judged self-deprecation the tedious and at times morally degenerate days spent in clerical drudgery for little reward. He finally volunteered for—and got—a placement in Ireland which proved to be a financial and creative liberation. He turned many of his London experiences to good account in his novels, not least his frequent scrapes with moneylenders. The tribulations of Burgo Fitzgerald (*see p. 114*) are in part based on Trollope's own tailor's bill of £12 that grew, fed by compound interest, into a massive £200.

Other writers seek solitude. In *De Profundis* Wilde recalls his vain attempt to cloister himself in Piccadilly and work away from the domestic interruptions of his wife and children in Chelsea. He had not bargained, though, for the attentions of Lord Alfred Douglas, 'Bosie', who was broke, idle and bored and insisted on a daily programme of expensive and disruptive lunches and dinners. Wilde contrasts these bacchanals at the Café Royal or the Berkeley with the intimate—and