

Comparing john drydens the fire of lond essay sample



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For this essay I will be comparing John Dryden's 'The Fire of London' that uses vivid description to portray the effect of the vicious fire on the helpless people of London; with Byron's 'Darkness' which conveys an apocalyptic image of the earth after the volcanic eruption of Tambora (1815).

Both of the poems use apocalyptic imagery to convey a sense of doom and destruction as 'A dismal picture of the gen'ral doom' (Dryden) and 'The bright sun was extinguish'd' (Byron), both of the poems are different as Dryden and Byron describe the destructive events on a different scale with Byron describing the eruption as all of God's creation being crippled by the events, Dryden however depicts only a small portion of the fire in his poem.

In the first few lines of 'The Fire of London' Dryden expresses a sense of an ominous danger and uneasiness 'night came, but without darkness or repose' this expresses a sense of uneasiness as there is an inversion which emphasises the fact that things are unbalanced making the reader feel uneasy and suspicious.

Dryden also expands on the sense of danger 'A dismal picture of the gen'ral doom', 'when the trumpet blows,' by doing this Dryden conveys the fact that all is not well by using the apocalyptic imagery ('gen'ral doom') which hints that the world will end soon due to the horrific fire. Dryden again tells us of the horrific nature of the disaster 'Souls... half unready with their bodies come.' This emphasises the fact that the disaster was very sudden and unexpected using words such as 'unready' and 'distracted'.

Dryden also uses plosive sounds to give the first stanza a very bleak and dark tone for example 'dismal and doom'. At the start of 'Darkness' Byron
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creates a natural rhythm by using iambic pentameter which then alters its natural pattern to stress the abnormal for example ' rayless' ' pathless' by doing this Byron highlights the fact that nothing about this disaster is expected and rarely happens, which also explains the fact why people struggle to cope with it.

At the start of the poem Byron emphasises the size of the eruption saying that even ' The bright sun was extinguish'd,' by saying this Byron uses apocalyptic imagery to put across the sheer magnitude of the eruption and how the thing that has always been there for as long as humans have lived (' The bright sun') has been (' extinguish'd') which seems to hint that nothing is safe from the eruption.

Byron again stresses the power and horrifying nature of the eruption by saying ' the stars... wung blind and blackening in the moonless air,' Byron seems to use the awkward nature of the stars to foresee what will happen to those that are caught in the sights of the volcano, that their future is set and they are doomed to suffer a catastrophic breakdown in their society. Byron also uses alliteration ' blind and blackening' to accentuate the unpleasantness and horrid nature of the eruption.

Byron uses a sense of inversion ' all hearts were chill'd,' to create a feeling of abnormality as hearts are supposed to be warm but the disaster has caused them to be ' chill'd. ' We see another example of how the eruption has levelled society in the line ' The palaces of crowned kings-the huts... were burnt for beacons. ' The disaster seems to be used as a relentless equalising force that will stop at nothing to bring everybody to the same level.

Byron mentions both the rich and the poor by doing this he shows how no one is safe from the disaster and the volcano will not spare anybody. What you once were and what you once had matters for nothing now 'men gather'd round their blazing homes.' Byron describes those who live close to volcano 'happy were those who dwelt within the eye,' Byron describes them as 'happy' because they will die quickly and will not suffer the great pain and suffering of those not as lucky as them.

Again Byron details how humans are affected by the destruction and horrifying nature of the disaster 'and fed their funeral piles with fuel.' Here Byron uses this descriptive imagery to state that humans have been reduced to fodder for the flames and there is nothing which can be done to save themselves. He tells us 'their chins upon their clenched hands and smiled' this shows that humans have seemingly accepted the fact they are going to suffer an inevitable death or it could show how the disaster has caused many to be driven to a crazed state of madness.

We learn in the next few lines that it is not only humans who are effected by the volcano 'wild birds... did flutter on the ground and flap their useless wings,' here Byron uses a sense of inversion to display how much the disaster is affecting everything that becomes to its fiery clutches as you would expect wild birds to be fearless but they are described 'wild birds did shriek' and 'terrified.'

Byron again uses a sense of inversion 'the wildest brutes came tame and tremulous' this again shows how even the 'wildest' of animals can become 'tamed' by the volcano. Byron also seems to compare animals to humans '

gnash'd their teeth and howled' by doing this Byron may be again implying how the volcano as levelled society or he could be using this imagery to show how the volcano has created a new type of human one that possesses inhuman and animal qualities.

By describing it in this way Byron may also be hinting that humans have gone down on the evolutionary scale due to this disaster. In the second paragraph of Dryden's 'Fire of London' we begin to see the perspective shrink as the poet starts to talk of certain people's 'last lodging,' which highlights the fact that it is not a permanent home and is only temporary and not a place which could be called home and is not somewhere which is safe and secure to stay in, showing how badly the fire has affected the people.

It could also be interpreted as being their last resting place which could be seen that Dryden is implying that there is no escape from the fiery clutches of the fire. Dryden again highlights this by saying 'short uneasie sleeps,' this shows how the fire is affecting people mentally as they are unable to sleep as they are anxious and distracted of their own devastating destruction.

Dryden also describes the people as 'wand'ring,' by saying this Dryden shows that the people are confused and bewildered by the madness and devastation that currently surrounds them.

Towards the end of the paragraph Dryden provides the reader with an extremely despairing and sad image of how people see how 'near their own destruction tends', thus showing how people are accepting the fact that there is a certain inevitability about their own death and others around them.

In the third paragraph of Dryden's 'Fire of London' the focus of the poem

moves to those who have no homes ' those who have none sit round where it once was.

Dryden's description of the people in this poem makes it easy to sympathise and feel sorry for them ' full eyes' meaning that they may be crying or simply just shocked by the sudden and shocking events which have occurred. Dryden again creates a sense of sympathy ' each wanted room required', all these people want is to have their homes and possessions back which have been cruelly taken away, by describing it in such a simple way this ties in with the simple desire of the people, therefore making it easy to feel sorry for these people as they only want the simplest things.

Next we get another picture of how the fire has affected the people ' haunting the yet warm ashes of the place' by calling them ' ghostly' Dryden implies that humans have become almost like ghosts and therefore being de-humanised, again showing the overwhelming and shattering experiences that these people have had to go through. The same imagery is used in the next line in the simile ' As murder'd men walk where they did expire' which again shows the devastating nature of the fire as not only the trend of lifelessness among humans is continued but the fact they cling to what they desire ' where they did expire'.

It is almost like they feel like they have been violated as their essence and spirit seem to have been ripped from them by the cruel selfless hands of the fire. In the second section of Byron's ' Darkness' we see a shift from the description of the landscape and cosmic forces to more of a human aspect as Byron starts to describe how humans as a population are coping with the

disaster. We also get to see as in the 'Fire of London' how the perspective of the poem changes from concentrating on how all humans are coping to just a few humans which gives the poem more of a personal aspect.

We first see signs of how humans are dealing with it when Byron says 'sate sullenly' by saying this Byron implies that there is a breakdown of community and that the human race has been reduced to selfish individualism in a hope to survive. This shows how much the eruption has changed humans as they are normally kind, caring and selfless people but they have had to change in order to survive.

We see another example of this 'gorging himself in gloom: no love was left', by saying 'gorging' Byron implies that the people are eating like ravenous beasts, whose first instinct is to survive and they will sacrifice anybody in order to achieve this, Byron says this 'no love was left' again this is just one of the many times that Byron by using strong description hints that human nature has been changed as a result of this tragedy.

As seen earlier in the poem Byron again implies that humans want a quick and painless death and although they may hope that they will survive they believe that they will not, 'all earth was but one thought and that was death immediate and inglorious', by describing the thought of not one but 'all earth' Byron is describing the thought of everyone thus showing the impact that the volcano has caused as people actually wish to die making the poem more tragic and horrifying.

We the best example of Byron making the poem more horrifying and

shocking, 'the meagre by the meagre were devour'd', Byron says that <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-john-drydens-the-fire-of-lond-essay-sample/>

humans have resorted to cannibalism in order to survive. It is like humans have reversed to their primal instinct thus showing how desperate and deprived they are. It is almost like humans are lost and have forgotten who they are and what they meant to be as a result of the volcano.

Byron by describing it in this way saying 'meagre' implies that they literally have no choice but to do it in order to survive. We see another example of how the volcano is affecting those caught up in its chaos, 'Even dogs assail'd their masters', dogs are supposed to be man's best friend and put their lives on the line for humans but Byron shows us that for all the love and care that someone has for another goes out the window in order to survive.

However Byron does show us a glimmer of morality and loyalty, 'all save one and he was faithful', 'himself sought out no food', Byron uses this dog as a metaphor to show us that there is still a last flicker of morality left in the world, it is almost like morality and loyalty's last stand against the cruel, hateful evil that is the volcano. Nevertheless the dog and morality with it succumbs to the powerful and vengeful volcano, 'a quick desolate cry licking the hand which answers'd not with a caress- he died.

In the fourth paragraph of Dryden's 'Fire of London', Dryden starts to describe the fire in detail using various metaphors and similes to accentuate the effect of the fire. For example Dryden uses the metaphor 'Some stir up coals and watch the Vestal fire', to highlight the perpetual and everlasting effects the fire brings as the Vestal fire was something that never went out and Dryden compares the Fire of London to it.

There is also a certain irony in what he says as the Vestal fire was something that was holy and divine whereas the Fire of London is something destructive and devastating to those caught up in it, Dryden does this to highlight how bad the Fire of London really was. Another example of Dryden using metaphor, 'while through burning Lab'rincths they retire', in this metaphor Dryden implies there is no escape, by referring to 'Lab'rincths' Dryden by doing this implies that the fire is like being stuck in a maze with no escape.

Dryden also may be comparing the fire to Hell where there is no escape and once you are in Hell you are stuck there for eternity. This is similar to how Byron describes humans caught up in the volcano, Dryden however in this paragraph uses diabolic imagery and metaphor to describe humanity's fall 'burning Lab'rincths' whereas Byron puts it in more of a blunt and direct way, 'and fed their funeral pyres with fuel'.

Dryden continues using the theme of using various metaphors and similes to highlight the effects of the fire in the next stanza as well. For example 'The most in fields, like herded beasts lie down,' Dryden by saying this implies that humans have been forced into solidarity to survive and have lost all power that they once had before the fire. In this paragraph Dryden also tells us of the innocence of youth, 'while their babes in sleep their sorrows drown'.

By doing this Dryden highlights the fact that in the world of horror caused by the fire there is still an inch of morality and decency left in the world. This is not unlike Byron's dog, 'all save one and he was faithful', 'himself sought out no food', both writers use symbols of decency in their metaphors to

portray that not all things in their worlds is entirely horrible and hideous and there is something to lift people's spirits up.

However again not unlike Byron, Dryden decides to follow the image of something good with something bad, 'Sad parents watch the remnants of their store', this shows that others are burdened by their consciousness and are worried in contrast to the baby's as they are unaware of the devastation being caused by what surrounds them. In the next section of 'Darkness' Byron starts to focus on the last two survivors of the disaster, 'but two of ... they were enemies'.

Byron by mentioning that they are 'enemies', implies that they have reverted back towards their primal instinct and they have to compete with each other for food showing how badly people have been affected by the volcano. Also in this stanza we see another example of Byron using inversion to highlight the abnormal and also the fact that things are unbalanced and out of place, 'where they had been heap'd a mass of holy things for an unholy usage', by doing this Byron creates a sense of everything being turned upside down as they are using things which are meant to be holy and righteous for unholy and unrighteous acts.

It also shows how little regard the two last survivors are showing for anything other than themselves as they are willing to insult greater powers to make certain objects useful in order to survive probably by killing. This shows a lack of principles in this world as they are willing to disregard religion in the desperation that the disaster has caused. In the penultimate sentence of "

"Darkness" Byron decides to focus on the void and emptiness that the disaster had caused.

For instance, 'the world was void', Byron uses this as an introduction to the final stages of the poem. Quite cleverly Byron uses a caesura after it to stress the idea which will be presented. Throughout the poem Byron has used an iambic pentameter rhythm, however he breaks this rhythm, 'Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless' by doing this he stresses the first syllable of each word. This stresses all of the things that have been destroyed or damaged.

Therefore highlighting how much has been destroyed and reminds us of the death and destruction which has been caused. As we have seen before in the poem Byron uses different metaphors to put across how empty the world is now, 'a lump of death-a chaos of hard clay', by describing the world as a 'lump and as clay' Byron implies that all meaningful objects and life in general are now void and all is left is one colour and one texture ('clay'). This suggests that the entire world has been turned into a simple and basic nothingness as a result of the volcano.

In the final line of 'Fire of London', Dryden gives us a very simple and very poignant image which tells us how the city and the people in it are coping with life in the disaster, 'An Infant, waking, to the paps would press, and meets, instead of milk, a falling tear'. This inversion tells us that one of the most precious things in the world to humans, a baby who is unaware of the disaster is instead of being fed by her mother is in its place being met with a

tear. This inversion highlights how devastating the fire has been on those in the midst of it.

Both writers use inversions throughout their poems to highlight just how bad something is, 'all hearts were chill'd,' (Darkness), 'instead of milk a falling tear' (Fire of London). However there is a difference Byron uses his inversions on a much larger scale than Dryden, as Byron seems to over exaggerate more whereas Dryden seems to use his to focus on a more of a balanced and reasonable level. In the last sentence of 'Darkness', we see Byron describing the situation of the world by using nature and associating it with death.

He also uses personification to highlight this as well, 'The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave, The moon, their mistress, had expired before'. This shows the strength of the disaster as it has not only destroyed living things and objects but has also thrown the whole universe into chaos as the forces of nature are being destroyed and they are in the end more powerful than any living thing or object. Therefore showing how much power the volcano must have possessed as now everything in its path is feeble and incredibly vulnerable.

The final thought of the poem is a personification of all consuming darkness that has swept the world and is Byron's way of summing up his poem, Darkness had no need of aid from them -she was the universe. After looking and comparing both poems description and imagery, I have concluded that although both poems describe and illustrate disaster's that hurt and cause suffering to both humans and those alike, Byron however seems to focus

more on the sheer scale and size of the eruption describing more of the destruction caused rather than the emotional side of things, ' The bright sun was extinguish'd'.

Whereas Dryden depicts more of the emotional and the human frame of mind during the fire rather than the sheer destruction, ' instead of milk a falling tear'. A common theme throughout both poems is the use of metaphor to put across the feeling of the people or the scale of the disaster. Therefore the two poems ' Darkness' and ' Fire of London', are similar in that they both describe a life changing but also horrifying event but differ in the way that the writers have chosen to describe there event as one depicts the human impact whilst one depicts the destruction and scale of the particular disaster.