

The different presentations of London in the diary of Samuel Pepys and "rising da..."



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These two works of literature both construct depictions of London; however, because they were written at different periods and in different formats, we receive inevitably different interpretations of the city and the life within.

Pepys' diary is very descriptive, almost written as if a narrative, telling of events in a chronological order but does however effectively express the way in which the horrors of the fire makes him feel whereas Fanthorpe's poem, *Rising Damp*, by the nature of it being in verse, carries connotations of both the factual and the emotional side of literature, telling us of how he perceives London, but using words and meter to evoke feelings within the reader and then linking the description of the city figuratively back to his view on human pre destination.

Fanthorpe in this first stanza makes the reader think beyond the mundane routine of his or her life, to a world where "at our feet they lie low"; to the often-forgotten place where the city originated from. The double stressed syllables at the end of the line in a spondee, helped by the soft alliteration makes vivid the point he is trying to create of a world we never see but which is so important. Conversely, Pepys' description of the "horrid, malicious, bloody flame" which stretched across London "as the fire grew" develops the feeling of something less subtle and not forgotten, but something blatant and too terrifying that it has been referred to with destructive, animalistic adjectives. The asyndeton for the description of the flame helps to make it seem almost more monstrous, as if Pepys himself is lost for words at the sight.

Whereas with Pepys' description of London we get many developed, modern place names such as "The Three Cranes" and "Buttulph's Warf" which

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perhaps is to be expected with the narrative, diary style entry, Fanthorpe's includes the names of specific rivers and refers to them as the "underground// Rivers of London", hinting at the idea that it was these few rivers that laid the foundations that enabled other constructions to be made which constitute the make up of the town now. The capitalisation and the line break in enjambment stress this idea further, as if honouring the rivers with a title incarnation.

We receive a feeling of great work being dashed or disregarded and a tragic sense of non-recognition in both pieces. Pepys says " churches, houses, and all on fire; all flaming at once" and this sounds similar in Fanthorpe's poem when he writes " the names are disfigured, frayed, effaced". It is as if these great monuments and works of so many generations, unavailable to the earth without the indispensable foundations laid by these ancient rivers, are so easily removed, wiped out but the faintest blotch or concealment, and will inevitably, as the rivers have been, be forgotten. Both these pieces lay bare the fraud in humanity and its creations, that what it makes is nothing but subject to fate, that its superficiality is futile in the end. The sense of bathos and emptiness is evoked in these two citations by the asyndeton, the tricolon and the repetition of " all" in Pepys, as if " all" has been shown up to be false.

The second stanza on Fanthorpe's poem is very figurative and the extended metaphor and personification of the original rivers as the builders, the founders of the civilisation that now lives around it is effective: " The Magogs that chewed//the day to the basin"... " that washed the clothes and turned the mills". It is as if these rivers provided both domestic and manual labour
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for the future inhabitants. The lolling iambic meter helps to construct the image of dedicated, continual labour, with the masculine ending further emphasising the strains of the manual labour. This is also true in Pepys' diary with the "drops and flakes of fire" and the "horrid noise the flames made, cracking of houses at their ruin" which add an interesting intimation of vivid, animalistic description into a bland diary, likening the natural image of "drops of rain" to that of a fanciful, monstrous inferno. His description seems equally figurative and metaphorical here as if the reader is in a nightmare.

We gain effectively from both works the idea of expansion or diminishment and reduction. Pepys' description of the fire being nourished by man's creation of the city is striking and brilliant: "as it grew darker, it appeared more and more, and in corners and upon steeples, and between churches and houses". The growth and expansion of the fire is captured by the scale of the city and the polysyndeton and repetition of words is enacting the way in which the fire moves, engulfing one thing then the next. The harping on the colour "black" is foreboding and ominous compared with the descriptions of the buildings. Conversely, in *Rising Damp*, the rivers have been "buried alive in earth.// Forgotten, like the dead" which suggests they still have a lot to offer, but people have taken them for granted and cast them off. The definitive iambic trimeter and end stop is stark and sounds shocking, and the caesura, acting as a fulcrum between the pair of three monosyllables sounds pathetic.

It is interesting how in *Rising Damp*, the idea of how the rivers sculpted the city we know today and how essentially they offer the structural origin on which all major cities are built. It is as if they are always there, "returning <https://assignbuster.com/the-different-presentations-of-london-in-the-diary-of-samuel-pepys-and-rising-damp/>

spectrally after heavy rain, // Confounding suburban gardens” to act as a steady reminder of the rock and power the cities are founded on. The harsh dental consonants perhaps emphasise the way they reveal suddenly, with a crisp appearance. Not only are the rivers projected in Fanthorpe’s poem as a haven of safety and hope, but in Pepys’ diary it is described that, to escape the fiery inferno engulfing the whole area around the city, people retreated to what they understood to be the fundamentals of safety, what has been from the very beginning of time: the river. It is described that “ the river full of lighters and boats taking in goods, and good goods swimming in the water” and Pepys himself says “ there upon the water again and to the fire up and down”. It is interesting to note here the fact that water in this context is associated with light; not the light of a raging flame or the darkness, but a “ good light”, and the way “ good” is repeated in polyptoton makes vivid the way in which this area of water is a haven of safety, respite and hope. Again, the way in which they are described as “ on” the water, having it firmly as the base on which they are founded, juxtaposed with the “ fire up and down” emphasises the security and invincible sphere it helps develop.

The poem becomes more sincere, metaphorical and figurative in the final stanza. The rivers, “ being of our world, they will return” which suggests, with the effective assonantal sounds, a sense of the supernatural merging with these rivers, forgotten under the surface of our lives. The fact “ they will Jack from the box // will deluge cellars, will detonate man holes” carries a feeling of surprise and the nature of the colloquial phrase makes the poem sound all too familiar, as if its meaning was to reach us all. The anaphora of “ will” sounds definitive; as if there will be difficult implications with this death.

The enumeratio of the names of the supernatural rivers makes us listen, as if we understand the importance of the content. The poignant end to the poem is not only heightened by the intensive focus on the metaphor, but also the mimetic use of enjambment in “ It is the other rivers that lie// Lower” and the soft alliteration makes vivid the physical inference of a river lying lower in geographical terms, but also in a human, inner sense, a more figurative euphemism of a route to death. The poet effectively relates it to the audience and himself with the collective pronoun “ we feel their tug” as if now it is about something we have all experienced. The list of the name of rivers to finish with is ominous as they are all rivers associated with death- perhaps drawing parallels between how humanity was founded on the basis we die, and so these physical rivers are only there to encourage that.

Similarly, in Pepys’ description of London, he lays bare how quick and easy yet unsettling death can be “ as houses were burned by these drops and flakes of flames” and as “ there was an entire arch or fire from this to the other side the bridge”. Both these works reminds us of the presence of the “ grim reaper” and debases the individual human to a state where he must re-evaluate his position and adjust it accordingly in concordance with what he understands his destiny to be.

These descriptions of the same place are very different explicitly. However, when we look at the implicit meanings and connotations evoked, they could not be more similar – reminding us to value what we have for what it really is, and to be aware of our fate and origins.