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English _____

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Darkness and Chaos

According to the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the form of an effective poem is inextricably linked to the author's conveyed theme. High-quality poetry should operate as a coherent whole – content and form should work closely together, with neither element dominating or contradicting the other. This notion of “organic unity” is effectively employed in Lord Byron's poem “Darkness” (1816), in which poetic structure and diction work together to reinforce the poem's central image of a chaos-dominated world devoid of light.

Throughout “Darkness,” Byron uses sound devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia to create the sense of mayhem dominating a darkened world. Repeating the initial consonant sounds in “burnt for beacons” and “fed their funeral piles with fuel” helps convey the poem's message by emphasizing the people's continued, desperate scrabbling for some form of light (ll. 13, 27-28). The use of onomatopoeia draws the reader into the poem by allowing him or her to hear the sounds of chaos through “gnash'd” teeth, men that “shriek'd” because of their hideousness, and “crackling” tree trunks (ll. 32, 66, 20). The sounds of pandemonium and the uses of alliteration in this poem together reiterate the poem's theme of a chaotic, unlit world filled with inhabitants desperate for light.

In addition to using alliteration and onomatopoeia, Byron employs by employing the suffix “-less” repeatedly, creating a pattern that signifies the widespread loss and death that constitute the poem's central theme. He describes the stars as “rayless” and “pathless” in a

“moonless air” and characterizes the earth as “seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless,” and “lifeless,” creating an empty feeling through the use of “-less” that mirrors the emptiness of a world lacking light (ll. 4,5,71). Also, Byron intersperses the poem with images suggesting a loss of life and happiness in order to enhance the poem’s dismal mood. The “wither’d” winds, tides in their “grave,” and “expir’d” moon together reinforce the state of depressing desolation that dominates the poem (ll. 80, 78, 79).

Byron’s use of a single, very long stanza instead of the expected, shorter stanzas of 4-8 lines used by other poets deliberately makes the poem difficult to read, jumbling the assorted images, sounds, and smells that constitute the poem’s central scene of chaos. Employing only one stanza with eighty-two lines renders the poem . . .