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THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB:

Summary of "The Destruction of Sennacherib" by Lord Byron:

"The Destruction of Sennacherib" narrates a biblical account from the Book of Kings. The poem describes the Assyrian king Sennacherib's military campaign against the city of Jerusalem. As the Assyrian army surrounds the city, divine intervention occurs in the form of an angel, leading to a supernatural and catastrophic event. The angel of death descends upon the Assyrian camp, bringing destruction and scattering the once formidable army. The poem vividly portrays the chaos and the sudden reversal of fortunes, highlighting the ephemeral nature of human power and the inevitable influence of divine forces.

Byron employs vivid imagery and a dramatic narrative style to convey the magnitude of the event. The destruction of Sennacherib's army serves as a cautionary tale, emphasizing the limits of human strength and the unpredictability of divine intervention in the face of arrogance and aggression. The poem reflects Byron's fascination with historical and biblical themes, using them to explore deeper philosophical reflections on the transience of earthly power.

STRUCTURE:

"The Destruction of Sennacherib" by Lord Byron is structured as a narrative poem, and it follows a regular rhyme scheme and metrical pattern. Here's an analysis of the poem's structure:

1. **Rhyme Scheme:** The poem follows a consistent AABB rhyme scheme throughout, where each pair of lines rhymes with the next. This structure contributes to the poem's musicality and rhythm, enhancing its readability and memorability.
2. **Meter:** Byron uses iambic tetrameter, with each line consisting of four iambs (pairs of unstressed and stressed syllables). The regularity of the meter creates a steady and predictable rhythm, underscoring the poem's narrative flow.
3. **Stanzas:** The poem is divided into four quatrains (four-line stanzas), each presenting a distinct phase of the narrative. The stanzas contribute to the organization of the poem, allowing for a systematic progression of events.
4. **Narrative Structure:** The poem follows a chronological narrative structure, recounting the events surrounding the destruction of Sennacherib's army. The narrative unfolds with clarity, presenting the Assyrian invasion, the divine intervention, and the subsequent chaos in a logical sequence.
5. **Imagery and Descriptive Language:** Byron employs vivid imagery and descriptive language to bring the scenes to life. Each stanza is rich with details

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Author Review and Analysis

Lord Byron, one of the leading figures of the Romantic movement, is known for his passionate and expressive writing style, often marked by a deep engagement with history, mythology, and religion. "The Destruction of Sennacherib" is a perfect example of Byron's ability to blend historical events with a lyrical and dramatic narrative.

Byron's fascination with grand and tragic themes is evident in this poem. He brings the biblical story to life with a sense of grandeur and drama, using vivid imagery and a rhythmic, almost musical, verse structure. The poem's focus on divine retribution reflects Byron's interest in the themes of fate, power, and the transient nature of human achievements. The destruction of Sennacherib's army serves as a stark reminder of the limitations of human power and the ultimate authority of the divine.

The poem is also characteristic of the Romantic era's emphasis on the sublime, a concept that involves awe-inspiring beauty or terror, often in the context of nature or the divine. The sudden and overwhelming destruction of a powerful army in the poem is a perfect example of the sublime, as it evokes a sense of both awe and fear.

Comparison and Grammatical Techniques

Comparison with Other Poems

1. **Comparison with "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley:** Both "The Destruction of Sennacherib" and "Ozymandias" deal with the theme of the transience of power. While Byron focuses on the immediate and dramatic downfall of Sennacherib's army, Shelley's "Ozymandias" reflects on the inevitable decay of human achievements over time. Both poems convey a message about the futility of human arrogance and the impermanence of worldly power.
2. **Comparison with "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:** Both poems depict military engagements but with vastly different outcomes and tones. "The Destruction of Sennacherib" portrays a divinely orchestrated and almost effortless defeat, emphasizing divine power, whereas "The Charge of the Light Brigade" honours the bravery and tragedy of soldiers charging into battle, focusing on human valour and sacrifice. Byron's poem is more concerned with divine intervention, while Tennyson's work highlights human courage and the horror of war.

Grammatical Techniques and Literary Devices

1. **Anapaestic Tetrameter:** The poem is written in anapaestic tetrameter, a rhythmic pattern where each line consists of four feet, each containing two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable (da-da-DUM). This gives the poem a swift, almost galloping rhythm, which mirrors the movement of the Assyrian army and the suddenness of their destruction. The rhythmic flow contributes to the dramatic impact of the poem.

Example:

"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold."

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2. **Imagery:** Byron uses vivid imagery to create powerful visual scenes. The Assyrians are described with rich, colourful images that highlight their power and wealth, such as "gleaming in purple and gold." This contrasts sharply with the desolate imagery that follows their destruction: "And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword, / Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

Example:

"And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!"

3. **Alliteration:** The poem features alliteration, which adds to its musical quality and emphasizes key moments. For instance, the repetition of the "s" sound in "sunset" and "silent" in the line "And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea" creates a soft, hissing sound that contributes to the poem's eerie atmosphere.

Example:

"And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal."

4. **Contrast:** Byron uses contrast effectively throughout the poem, particularly between the vibrant life of the Assyrian army before the divine intervention and their lifelessness afterward. The vivid descriptions of the army's splendour ("purple and gold") contrast with the finality of their downfall ("melted like snow").

Example:

"For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed."

Quotes and References

1. **"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, / And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;"**
 - This opening line introduces the Assyrian army with a simile, comparing them to a predatory wolf descending on a vulnerable flock. The imagery of "purple and gold" highlights their wealth and power.
2. **"For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast, / And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;"**
 - This line personifies death as an angel, emphasizing the divine and sudden nature of the Assyrian army's destruction.
3. **"And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword, / Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."**
 - This metaphor illustrates the total and effortless nature of the destruction, with the army disappearing as quickly and silently as snow melting in the sun, underscoring the power of divine will.

Conclusion

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"The Destruction of Sennacherib" by Lord Byron is a powerful and dramatic poem that explores themes of divine retribution, the transience of human power, and the sublime. Byron's use of rhythmic anapaestic tetrameter, vivid imagery, and contrast creates a compelling narrative that leaves a lasting impact on the reader. The poem's exploration of the impermanence of worldly power invites comparison with other works that deal with similar themes, such as Shelley's "Ozymandias." Through its masterful use of language and literary techniques, "The Destruction of Sennacherib" remains a striking example of Byron's poetic genius.

Poem :

The Destruction of Sennacherib

- 1 The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
- 2 And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
- 3 And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
- 4 When the blue waves roll nightly on deep Galilee.

- 5 Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
- 6 That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
- 7 Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
- 8 That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

- 9 For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
- 10 And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
- 11 And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
- 12 And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

- 13 And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
- 14 But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride,
- 15 And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
- 16 And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

- 17 And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
- 18 With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail,
- 19 And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
- 20 The lances uplifted, the trumpet unblown.