

Free research paper about poetic voices on slavery

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Frances Harper is one of the famous African-American authors from the nineteenth century. She has written various literary works such as poems, stories and, essays revolving around themes of racial pride, female self-esteem and, equal rights . In general, Frances has used her talent of writing, hence her literature, as her way of protesting against evils of society.

Likewise, *The Slave Mother*, by Frances Harper portrays the horrors and brutalizing nature of slavery. Unlike other literary works chosen for the assignment, this poem in particular describes the psychological and emotional pain resulting from slavery and separation. The poem is full of agony and it is devoid of hope. In *The Slave Mother*, Frances chose motherhood as theme to raise her voice. The poem describes the aspect of slavery in which children are separated from their mothers forcibly to be sold. In addition to this, mother's grief for her son is used to symbolize the extent of the pain slavery results in.

Moreover, she has used very harsh imagery to make reader realize the pain and desperation of enslaved mother. The grief of victim can be sensed from the very beginning of poem when Frances says in first four lines “ Heard you that shriek? It rise/ So wildly on the air/ It seems as if a burden'd heart/ Was breaking in despair” . In this way, the reader understands the psychological loss of her mother, and sympathizes with her throughout the poem. The reader has been able to develop relation with the slave merely due to the Frances use of visual language and due to consistent rhythm and rhyming scheme. Apart from this, Frances has also used anaphora throughout the poem. She has repeated the phrase “ He is not hers” thrice to emphasize upon the fact, although the boy is her son but slavery has forcibly separated

both of them and sold her son to a stranger.

The second literary work chosen for comparison is *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Just like other two poems chosen for assignment, this poem is also about evils of slavery and its horrible aspects. Elizabeth Barrett has beautifully described injustice and racism in this poem by taking help of mother-child relationship. This is quite similar to Frances way of raising voice against slavery.

In addition, both the poets chose African women to be victims in their poems to emphasize upon the fact that black people are made to suffer more.

Elizabeth has also used repetition of phrases (anaphora) to emphasize on her intention. " I am Black!" occurs repeatedly in the poem portraying the fact that African Americans are deprived of freedom. They are miss-treated merely because their skin is not white.

Elizabeth has used relatively simple language instead of harsh imagery to portray her thoughts. However, she has used her ability of visual language beautifully that the reader tends to imagine the complete scene in his mind.

In contrast to other two selected poems, *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point* shares more than one theme. Elizabeth intends to raise voices against both, violation against one's independence and one's body. At that time, masters frequently exploited female slaves sexually. As per one of the slave's laws, if a female slave gave birth to a child of her master the baby automatically became part of the harsh labor world .

In this poem, the main character (slave woman) is running from her master with his baby whom she gave birth. She hates her baby and wants to kill her. However, the reason remains ambiguous. Perhaps, she wants to kill the baby

because her white master is the father, as the poem says “ And the babe who lay on my bosom so, was far too white, too white for me” The baby reminds her of the harsh memories her master has given her. On the other hand, the woman wanted to kill the baby because she wanted to save the baby from harsh labor life, racism, and injustice

The third poem chosen for assignment is *The Slave’s Dream* by Henry Wadsworth. It is also a sad and heart touching poem portraying the evils of slavery. However, it is slightly different from *The Slave Mother* and *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point*. *The Slave’s Dream* does not reflect the relation of mother and child. In fact, Henry Wadsworth has chosen as a small boy to share his thoughts about slavery.

He describes how desperate a small child is for freedom and how slavery has put a period to his desires and life. Henry, basically, intends to emphasize that slavery is an evil and harsh truth of society whether it be in any phase of life. For a slave the only place where he can enjoy freedom is his dreams, and the only thing that can liberate his is death. The theme of poem is very depressing and moving. Poet has used a lot of imagery in the poem to describe the dream of slave.

Henry has used different literary devices to accomplish his aim. He has used simile (like a glorious roll of drums) and metaphor (mist and shadow of sheep) to make comparisons so that reader can clearly imagine what is happening in the poem. In contrast to Frances and Elizabeth’s poem, Henry has also used personification and irony in his poem. For example, the line “ Blast of the Desert cried aloud” describes the disappointment and desperation in air. Henry intends the reader to realize everything in the

environment desired to get freedom .

Through the poem Harper has described the how slavery destroys family relationships particularly black people . The poet has been successful in raising her voice as he used harsh imagery to induce feelings of pain and grief within the reader. Similarly, Elizabeth intended to highlight issues of feminism. She describes how limited choices do a woman has in her life. If one imagines, a mother cannot kill her baby. It is depressing to think that slavery even caused a mother to murder her baby.

Henry, on the other hand, wrote a poem with mixed emotions. It did not describe the physical or psychological torture of slavery but a general aspect of it. Reader, at the end of the poem, remains confused about whether he should be happy that death has provided him freedom from the harsh slavery life; or he should be sad due to his death. Either ways, Henry was successful in delivering his message that nothing but death provides freedom to a slave.

Works Cited

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