

Robert burns' "to a mouse"

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In the poems Robert Burns' " To a Mouse" and " The Mouse's Petition" by Anna Letitia Barbauld, many feelings and emotions about mice are brought forth. While both poems were written by different authors, many of the feelings they share towards mice are common. The analysis of the two poems will help to find the comparisons and differences in theme, political and social issues, diction, and tone. Examples from the poems will help to show the similarities and differences in the two.

The tone of each poet in the poems, many similarities become evident. Both poets portray a sad and guilty tone when talking about mice. When Barbauld begins to write about what she believes the mouse is feeling inside of the test cage, the reader gets an idea how the poet may also feel.

" For here forlorn and sad I sit, within the wiry grate." (Barbauld, 5-6) Barbauld uses a line in the poem to show how she thinks the mouse is feeling.

Robert Burns expresses an equal amount of remorse for the mouse in his poem. He does so by using his sad regretful and remorseful tone, much like Barbauld. " I'm truly sorry man's dominion has broken Nature's social union." (Burns, l. 7-8) Burns makes it obvious how he feels by using his tones throughout the poem to relay a message of guilt and sadness. The two poems share identical endings; Burns as well as Barbauld make reference to the fact that mice are much like men. Barbauld indicates, " So when destruction lurks unseen, which men, like mice, may share." (Barbauld, l. 45-48) Oddly enough, speaking to a mouse in the same tone, Burns states, " The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men Gang aft a-gley." (Burns, l. 39-40)

While both poems are written by different poets, in different years, the two share the same tone to help portray their views of mice and how they are misunderstood.

The themes in both of the poems are very similar also both poems are about mice and their life changing experiences with them. The common theme in Anna Barbauld's, " A Mouse's Petition," is cruelty and unfairness. The mouse Barbauld speaks of is being used for tests in a science lab, and will eventually be killed in such experiments. Anna writes through poem that this act is unjust and should not happen to such a creature. Through the use of the poem she tries to tell the scientist " Beware, lest in the worm you crush, a brother's soul you find." (Barbauld, l. 35-36) Barbauld relates that killing a mouse is not morally different from taking the life of a fellow man. The poems theme is effective and pushes the reader to feel sorrow for the poor mouse. In " To a Mouse" by Robert Burns, the ongoing themes are guilt and fear.

Burns knows what mice are up to, stealing his food from his crops and ruining his walls within his home to make homes of their own. Burns however, does not care because he himself feels guilty for the little mice. Burns feels like even though they may be a nuisance to some humans, the mice have no choice but to do these things to live to see another day. " I doubt na, whiles, but thou may thieve; What then? Poor beastie, thou maun live!" (Burns l. 13-14) Burns explains why he is not bothered that the mice steal his food. Burns also has the theme of fear in his poem. The mice fear men, and for good reason, Burns is aware of this and makes minimal effort to scare the mice while they are at work.

" An' justifies that ill opinion which makes thee startle," (Burns, l. 9-10) Burns discusses how the fear mice have for men is due to the brutes who have no patience to understand what the mice go through. While the two poems have different themes, one being cruelty and unfairness and the other being guilt and fear, the themes are similar in the fashion that both poets show remorse for the mice and what they go through. Barbauld never once mentions how mice may in fact have it easier than humans do, but in the final lines from " To a Mouse" Burns does indicate being a mouse may sometimes be easier.

" Still thou art blest compared wi' me! (Burns, l. 43) Burns states that even though a mouse may not want to be a human, Burns believes a mouse has the ability to solely live in the present, and cannot remember the past or have to think of the future. Burns shares the dread he feels when he must remember the past or think about the future. Burns wishes he never had such a burden, and believes mice would not want to have such a burden either. For this reason while the two poems' themes are very similar, they still have striking differences in how they view mice and men.

Many Political issues were raised when the two poems were written. In 1773, the same year " The Mouse's Petition" was written, the Boston tea party movement had happened. This happened soon after the British parliament granted it a monopoly to the North American tea trade. While this made the British happy it was the beginning of a revolt by the Americans. They felt they should not have to be taxed for their own goods. The Americans fought back by raiding the tea ships going to the British and dumping all the tea into the ocean. While this was a revolt for the Americans, for the British not much had happened except for the fact they had seen what happens as a

result of people being pushed into something they didn't want to do. This connection can be made to the Mouse in "A Mouse's Petition" because the mouse did not want to be a test subject but was forced to do so, left without a choice.

Wither or not Barbauld's writing was affected by the Boston Tea Party movement or not, the two happening in the same year seems to be enough of a connection to assume this was an effect. In 1785, the same year "To a Mouse" was written, Scotland was under the beginning of the highland clearances. Before 1785 many families and clans were getting relocated to other parts of Scotland so that the land could be used to raise big black sheep instead. The success of relocating humans for the use of their land became so popular that the evil countess of Sutherland used the threat of clearances to blackmail every young man on her vast estates to enlist in her regiment.

She then evicted their families later anyway. One is left to wonder if Burns was forced to take part in one of these dreadful moves, or simply had to experience seeing these events happen. Either way having to leave your land unexpectedly would take a toll on your mind mentally and physically. Especially if you were sent to war with promise your land would be safe, only to come back realizing your land had been taken away anyways.

In, "To a mouse," burns refers by stating through a part of his poem that he does not like the fact that he can remember the past, "The present only toucheth thee: But och! I backward cast my e'e On prospects drear! An' forward though I canna see, I guess an' fear!" (Burns, l. 49-53) Burns talks about how looking back on the past brings him disappointment and sorrow.

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Maybe this is because he was in the middle of relocation or had already gone through one due to the highland clearance. While material has not proven or disproven that Burns was a part of the highland clearance one can be left wondering if those events had an impact on his poem.

The poetic diction in the two poems is very unique. While both use plenty of metaphors, their vocabulary is much different. This is partly because Burns uses a Scottish accent in his poems to give off the Scottish feel. Barbauld uses regular 1700's English, much like other poets of the time from Britain. Burns's Scottish accent is used in the poem to give the reader an idea what it would sound like if he himself was to recite the poem. While the reader may not understand as quickly as if reading in regular English, it helps to read the poem exactly like it would be read. While at first it is a challenging task to understand, it later becomes simple to translate. Barbauld's poem is much more generic for what the poems looked like in her area in the 1700's, there is no accent used like in Burns's which makes the initial reading of her poem much easier.

One thing "To a Mouse" and "A Mouse's Petition" have in common is their use of metaphors. Burns uses metaphor less often than Barbauld, "An' bleak December's winds ensuin', Baith snell and keen!" (Burns l. 28-29) Burns discusses with the mouse about how the winter winds are sharp like a knife, a metaphor for the winter wind being cold and seeming like it can go right through your body. Barbauld uses metaphors more frequently, "May some kind angel clear thy path, And break the hidden snare." (Barbauld, l. 47-48) Barbauld is saying metaphorically that she hopes the man has a sudden

change of mind and his thoughts are changed for the good, not to use the mouse as a scientific test dummy.

The two poems being compared and contrasted show that the two are not so different. While there are many similarities and differences analysing political and social issues, diction, and tone have helped to find these similarities and differences. The two poems about mice are much more complex than the initial read. The reader must dig deep into the meanings of the poems, the diction, the time they were written, the social issues that were happening in those times, and the poet's tones to reveal the true meanings of the poems.

Works Cited

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