

Compare and contrast two romantic poems essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In this essay I will compare and contrast the treatment of relations between men and women in the poem 'Indian Woman's Death Song' by Felicia Hemans and an extract from 'Don Juan' (Canto 1, stanzas 8-36) by Lord Byron. Hemans created a narrative poem in a serious tone of voice as befits the lament she wrote about e. g. 'Death song'. The title of our first poem tells the reader what the poem will entail, and is used to shape the way it is read.

The narrator, using poetic language, begins in blank verse, setting the dominant mood of the poem of sorrowful melancholy, 'Above the sound of waters, high and clear, wafting a wild proud strain, her song of death.' The 'song' of the Indian Woman tells the reader of a husband's betrayal and how the woman feels that the only choice left to her is to commit suicide with her baby daughter. The stanzas are divided into quatrains and continued in iambic heptameter with a strong rhyme scheme of AABB. This regular rhyme scheme is self-completing and adds to the feeling of the Indian woman's resignation.

Heman uses stress and rhythm, reinforced by punctuation and alliteration to add to the power of the verse and the images created by her descriptive use of language. She has created a powerful rhythm to resemble the flow of water that the Indian woman is sailing on. By adding 's' in and at the end of the words in each verse she fashions an echoing soft 'ssh' sound which creates the imagery and sound of water. The repetition of the refrain of 'roll on, roll on,' repeated throughout the poem evokes the imagery of movement and adds to the whole meaning of the poem by the continuous advancement towards the inevitable death of the title.

The narrator tells the story in stanzas one to six and then finishes the tale in stanza eight. Stanza seven, the most poignant stanza, has the Indian woman address her child ' And thou, my babe! ' 2 and tell her how she wishes to save her from a ' woman's weary lot'3. Hemans also uses repetitive images of fragility as metaphors for the weakness and vulnerability of women; she depicts the canoe as fragile e. g. ' frail bark'4 and ' leaf-like'5 and uses other supporting images such as the ' weary bird'6 and the wounded deer.

The title of our second poem again gives us the information about the contents; the poem is predominately about Don Juan, his life and escapades. This particular extract from Don Juan continues Byron's narrative epic with the background story of Don Juan's parents. Donna Innez, Don Juan's mother, is the principal female figure in the first canto. She is a new woman and an intellectual, but is hypocritically maintaining a show of her marriage to Don Jose. Don Jose, Don Juan's father is an ' honourable man'7 but has been having affairs and has at least two mistresses.

The poem is told in third person by a narrator, who has his own personality (as a gossip and a cynic) and who is very descriptive about Don Juan's life. The rhyme scheme is ABABABCC; this form has been used to resemble colloquial speech, and allows the narrator to describe Don Jose and Donna Inez in a light, conversational and flippant manner. Byron also uses the verse-breaks and stanza-breaks in the poem to support the appearance of an orally told story, the verse-breaks and stanza-breaks also enhance the clarity of his writing. It is written mainly in iambic pentameter in octava rima; a six-verse stanza with a heroic rhyming couplet ending.

Byron uses the couplet ending often as a pun for humorous effect, ' But - Oh! Ye lords of ladies intellectual, Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck'd you all? ' 8 He also employs the use of words with more than a two-syllable rhyme to add to the comedic effect of the stanza and the wit of the poem as a whole. The tone of the poem is lighthearted, the author's attitude toward his subject was that he did not mean Don Juan to be taken seriously; he said that the poem was built as a ' satire on abuses of the present state of society.

Byron does not use figurative language in this extract, but he is very descriptive so the reader can form a mental image of characters such as Donna Inez. There is no repetition of words but there is the repetition of the idea of intelligence in women (which is not always seen to be such a good thing) and the idea of adultery - a theme that continues throughout the whole of Don Juan. We get closure at the end of the extract, and a literal ending for Don Jose who dies, freeing his wife from an unhappy marriage and leaving her ' to her own aversion[s]'10.

To see how each poet treats the relationships between men and women in each poem I will have to identify what relationships the poets have created. The first relationship that each poet creates is between the characters in the poem and the reader. If we compare the initial characterisation of the characters featured in Hemans poem and Byron's extract we can see that in a like manner both Byron and Heman concentrate on the female character of their works and that both works feature conventional feminine figures, the role of wife and mother.

However each poet treats this in different ways; although Donna Inez is featured as a lesser character to the main protagonists' story, stanza's 3 to 11 are devoted entirely to the description of Donna Inez's character, who is described as 'perfect past all parallel.'¹¹ Hemans as we see from the title of her poem wished the Indian Women to be the main focus of the reader, though compared to Byron we have no description of the Indian woman's character. Hemans wishes the Indian woman to be characterised by her deep feelings, which is very feminine and typical of the want of sensibility to some romantic verse.

Similarly both poets use a third person narrator to reflect on the lives and marital relationships of these women instead of allowing the women to describe their situations themselves. Don Jose and Donna Inez's relationship seems to go against the common inherited romantic idea of idealised love between characters as they end up 'wishing each other, not divorced, but dead;'¹² Don Jose is introduced in stanza 2 and doesn't reappear until the end of stanza 11 when we learn that he has a wandering eye and later that he has two mistresses.

The Indian Woman, also has a problem with her husband, 'My warrior's eye hath looked upon another face'.¹³ In comparison the two poems are very much alike in the sense that they are both poems about the same subject matter; that of the betrayal of a husband, however each poet treats the emotions of their characters differently. Both woman want to emancipate themselves from unhappy circumstances, both of their husbands have had affairs.

Stanzas 11 to 36 of Don Juan are concerned with Donna Inez's predicament of finding herself in an unhappy marriage and although she stays in the marriage her endeavor is to make her husband's life as miserable as possible. She is strong and defiant, attempting to get a divorce from her husband 'and tried to prove her loving lord was mad,'¹⁴. Hemans has the Indian women take a much more extreme view of her husband's infidelity by having her commit suicide with her child.

Hemans supports the popular image of a weak sentimental romantic figure of women (poetess's) which she has the Indian woman portray, however the suicide could also be seen as an act of courage against 'woman's weary lot.'¹⁵ Death appears to be a transcendence for the Indian woman and her child to a safer place where the woman will no longer feel the pain of betrayal and her daughter will never feel this pain of a broken heart. 'Too bright a thing art thou to pine in aching love away, thy mother bears thee far, young fawn, from sorrow and decay.'

In conclusion each poet treats the relationships between men and women very differently but with some similarities on themes. Byron with his bawdy comedic poem supports the social and political concerns of men; examples of this are apparent when we see how he snubs the bluestocking intelligence of Donna Inez e. g. in stanza nine and when he wishes Don Jose to be excused for his passions; hence the description of Jose as an honourable man.

Hemans supports the social and political concerns of women and by designing her poem to have a more emotional effect on the reader she uses

an important tool for women writers during the Romantic period which was the culture of poetesses writing about sensibilities; Hemans seems to embrace this device for the whole of the poem but at the same time, she supports the popular social concern by offering her predominately female audience a woman's voice that echoes their own trials and tribulations of being a woman in a patriarchal society.