Comparison of Sonnet 20 and Hard Rock Returns to Prison

Posted on September 19, 2019

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Ever since humanity has progressed from primitive to modern beings, people have gradually learned to describe their feelings towards an animate or inanimate object in the form of poems. William Shakespeare, a very renowned poet of the romantic era in England, describes and puts forth his feelings towards a man who has been blessed with the beauty of a woman in his poem, 'sonnet 20′. In "Hardrock Returns to the Prison from the Hospital for Criminal Insane", Erithridge Knight describes how a man in prison was broken down. Although the two poems differ by portraying contrasting realities of life, they exhibit sameness in discussing youth.

Fair Youth and the Harsh Realities of Prison

The poems are different in their literal meanings as they, as poets, represent different aspects of youth. Shakespeare, in his poem, focuses on fair youth created by nature while his central theme revolves around the beauty of a woman. Knight uses the circumstances of prison to create harsh realities that a man encounters in youth. Beauty is visible in the first line when the speaker addresses beauty: "a woman's face with nature's own hands painted. Hast thou the master-mistress of my passion" (1-2). The speaker in the first poem relates women to nature and its role in fair youth. He further explains that a woman in her perfect beauty leads to joy, pleasure and satisfaction.

Feminine Beauty and the Power of Nature

The speaker highlights the power of womanly beauty due to the attraction it carries for all men. The word master-mistress identifies the man as a subject who is beautiful and possesses feminine features. Knight, in his poem, created circumstances of miserable fate apparent in the lines, "Hard Rock was known not to take shit from nobody" (1-2). Knight, in his poem, recreates the historical issues of race by portraying the class gap and emphasizing the enslaved underclass. He creates the picture of racial and class differences leading to a criminal life. The speaker illustrates that society keeps enslaved or low-class humans in penal compounds. The enlightened side of youth against the harsh realities sets contrasting differences between the poems.

The poems are different in their overall message, apparent in themes of personified beauty against shocking facts of stealing power. Shakespeare, in the poem, reveals the power of nature that creates

a woman so beautiful that she falls in love with the man. Knight, in his poem, uncovers the reasons for a black male's insanity. The speaker reveals the intensity of beauty: "but since she pricked thee out of woman's pleasure. Mine be thy love and thy loves use their treasure" (13-14). In the lines, the poet argues that nature created man so good-looking that he intended to be a woman. The beauty makes him feminine and elegant, and nature itself falls for it. Through discussion of beauty, Shakespeare attempts to represent the selfishness of nature.

Race, Class, and the Destruction of Black Identity

The poem captivates the readers of both genders as it associates males with females. Knight represents the lives of African Americans who suffer the repercussions of race and class discrimination. An identity crisis is apparent in the poem as Knight mentions: "the word that Hard Rock wasn't a mean nigger. Anymore, that the doctors had bored a hole in his head" (6-7). The speaker explains the circumstances that result in black criminality and insanity. It is not the choice of the deprived community to engage themselves in criminal lifestyles, but society labels them as offenders. The speaker takes a defensive role in explaining the black community as he addresses the negative role that society plays. The revelation of beauty through nature's creation and exploration of brutality under social construct displays contrasting views.

Conflict as the Shared Poetic Device

Both poems use poetic devices to convey contrasting themes of nature versus social reality. The central device used by Shakespeare and Knight in the poems is conflict. Conflict is visible in Shakespeare's poem in the womanliness of a young man acquiring attributes of a female. Conflict is also apparent in Knight's poem, which is the division of humans into different classes. Shakespeare reveals conflict as he mentions, "which steals men's eyes and woman's soul amazeth. And for a woman worth thou first created" (8-9). The speaker uses poetic devices to represent the confusing state of males who resemble females for their beauty and gentleness of heart. Knight uses the poetic device to create settings of American culture that convey the conflicting realities. Conflict is prominent in the lines, "The testing came, to see if hard Rock was tame. A hillbilly called him a black son of a bitch" (23-24). The speaker, through his poetic techniques, tries to convince readers about the different sides of the same society. Black people continue to struggle due to the harsh and unfair treatment of Americans. Conflicting situations lead to criminal lifestyle choices that result in psychopathologies of black youth. The speaker continually recreates differences between blacks and whites. The poetic device of conflict allows poets to exhibit the role of nature versus society.

Youth Between Ideal Beauty and Social Brutality

Despite the time gap between Shakespeare and Knight, they represent contrasting views related to

youth. Both poets argue that youth puts the male into conflicting situations when they explore the deeper meaning of nature and society. Shakespeare, through setting the theme of feminine beauty, highlights nature's personification in the creation of a perfect being. Knight, in his poem, represents a conflict in society by uncovering tensions in American culture under the influence of race and discrimination. Conflict in desires and attention offsets the theme of personified nature with the conflicting realities discussed by Knight.

Work Cited

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