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# LITERARY Analysis

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The relations between the genders have always been one of the most widely exploited topics in the world literature. This sphere possesses a great potential for depicting conflicts of different nature and scale. Although harmony between men and women is present in many literary works, it is the clashes and tensions arising from serious misunderstandings that give writers an opportunity to show the human nature in great depth. The short story “Sweat” created by Zora Neale Hurston and the poem “My Last Duchess” by a prominent American poet Robert Browning are bright examples of this type of conflicts. Both authors prioritize their works as realistic accounts of the women’s lives that are systematically abused and oppressed by the men. The conflict depicted in these two works reveals the socially established inequalities between the men and women and is supported by different literary techniques that make it deeper and more profound.

“Sweat” is probably the most famous work of Hurston and often described as one of her “finest stories” that “incited wide-ranging discussion”. The reason for this attention and popularity is probably in the controversial nature of this story. It tells about a woman, Delia by name, who earns her living washing the whites’ clothes. She works very hard and uses every possible minute to do her work. Her husband, on the contrary, enjoys his lazy life. He is in no way grateful to his wife that she manages to make both ends meet; he abuses, beats her and humiliates her by exposing his lover

Bertha to the whole community.

This short story also explores the ideas close to the ideology of feminist individualism. Despite her inner pain, Delia manages to counteract her husband and defend her dignity in the ways that are available. "She seized the iron skillet from the stove and struck a defensive pose".

It must be mentioned that the conflict in this story lies not only in the sphere of gender relations. Delia is also torn apart by the conflict inside her. She clearly understands that Sykes ruined her life, but nevertheless at the beginning of the story she calls the providence to be the judge for Sykes. "Sometime or ruther, Sykes, like everybody else, is gointer reap his sowing". Later Sykes is poisoned by the snake, Delia does nothing to help him. Perhaps deep in her soul she is satisfied with this outcome. Nevertheless, taking into account her psychological state it is clear that some part of her wants to help Sykes because being indifferent when a man is dying in front of your eyes cannot be regarded as moral behavior. The fact that the author lets the "fate" kill Sykes and not Delia (which was also probably quite possible) means that Hurston approves that Sykes should be punished and Delia should begin a new life where nobody would humiliate her. This is a bright example of a literary technique called poetic justice. By a sudden twist in the plot Sykes is punished for all his bad and violent behavior.

"Sweat" has many examples of irony. When the fate of Delia's husband turns out to happen directly opposite to what he expected, it is a case of situational irony. This technique intensifies the conflict between the main characters and their feelings and ambitions. This irony can be also described

as a part of poetic justice mentioned above.

One of the literary techniques used in “My Last Duchess” is the unreliable narrator. This device creates a special atmosphere of the poem as the readers gradually understand that the narrator is possibly a vicious person who orders to kill his wife and his interpretation of the events that happened before could and should be doubted. The Duke may consciously mislead the person who listens to his story in order to persuade him that the last duchess was a woman without high moral principles. Once the readers understand that the narrator is unreliable, they tend to give second thoughts to the meaning of his phrases. For example, he says, “she liked whate’er / She looked on, and her looks went everywhere”. At first it is possible to conclude that these words describe the cheerful nature of the woman who was the duchess, but later a deeper meaning is revealed and the readers may conclude that the Duke strongly disapproves the behavior of his wife. He wanted her to completely belong to him and have no opportunity to communicate with others and be nice to them. It may mean that the Duke was not self-assured. His desire to deprive the duchess of her acquaintances and associates proves that she was just an object for him and he wanted to isolate her from the world. When it turned out to be too difficult he acted in the following way. “I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together”. Another literary technique that significantly influences the mood of the poem is the use of caesura. It is a break in the middle of the poetic line and in case of “My Last Duchess” it is employed simultaneously with enjambment. This technique adds a certain coloring to the conflict depicted in the poem. The usage of caesura and enjambment creates a very conversational style that is not characteristic of traditional poetry.

Browning's poem sounds like an ordinary talk between two men and the casual intonations with which the Duke speaks about the death of his wife produce an exceptionally shocking effect upon the readers. He says, "She thanked men – good! but thanked / Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked / My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody's gift". These numerous inclusions of conversational phrases prove that the order to kill his wife was not something extraordinary for him. He did it without much hesitation as something that he did every day.

In case of "My Last Duchess" it is obvious that persona does not reflect the author's ideas, but Browning uses the image of the Duke to show how fragile a fate of a woman can be if she is controlled by a powerful man that does not treat her as a human being. This poem has a sort of an open ending as the author leaves the readers with more questions than answers. Many details about the duchess's life are not clear, so the poem provokes further analysis and reconstruction of possible events.

One of the key similarities between these literary works is that in both texts objects play a very important role and symbolize the main ideological and psychological accents. In "Sweat" it is the clothes that Delia washes. It is a symbol of her efforts to make her life better. However, the clothes always get dirty again and Delia's pointless work is similar to that of Sisyphus. No matter what she does, happiness does not come. In some respect, her washing is an allegory of her life. In the poem "My Last Duchess" such a key object is a portrait of the duchess that the narrator shows to his visitor. "Due to a strategic allusion to Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," the modern speaker unknowingly echoes the Renaissance Duke, and the Duchess's

picture hovers behind the re-presentation of the modern artwork". This portrait enables sort of the dialogue between the present where the Duke is trying to arrange his new marriage and the past when he decided to murder his wife as she did not meet his demands.

Another vivid similarity is the focus of both texts on the realistic representation of human experiences. Even taking into account that the narrator in "My Last Duchess" is not reliable, the reader gets a very thoughtful description of how people may feel when the conflict of genders reaches its climax. It is worth to highlight that these works were created by the male and female writer, so the readers are able to analyze different visions of the same topic. Both authors agree that such inequality cannot bring anything good to the relations between men and women. It proves once again that humanity does not have any gender; it is a universal notion that must be applied both to men and women in equal shares.

To conclude, despite Hurston and Browning use different literary techniques in their works, these texts are united by one common conflict – the conflict between the genders. These works show how difficult and hard a life of a woman can be if she is deprived of respect and freedom. Female characters in these works are, to a large degree, victims of their husbands who constantly humiliated and oppressed them. Despite the fact that in "Sweat" the husband is punished by the fate, the main theme in these texts is the inequality of rights between men and women. The skills and talents of both authors enable them to show the depth of this problem and inspire the readers to study and analyze this aspect.