



FREEDOM TO THE SLAVE

HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZIO

The background features several thin, curved lines in shades of grey and white, creating a sense of motion and depth. These lines are arranged in concentric, overlapping arcs that sweep across the frame.

PRESENTED BY
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ABOUT THE POET



HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZIO (born April 18, 1809, Calcutta, India—died Dec. 26, 1831, Calcutta), poet and assistant headmaster of Hindu College, Calcutta, a radical thinker and one of the first Indian educators to disseminate Western learning and science among the young men of Bengal and for and for setting a new precedent for patriotic poetry in India.

Derozio was an Anglo-Indian poet who was considered one of the precursors of the Bengal Renaissance and he is also considered as the first Nationalist poet of India.

His patriotic poetry is an important landmark in the history of Indian Writing in English. “Freedom to the Slave” is one such poem where Derozio’s love for his country is reflected. It also taps on the themes of Romanticism such as free-thinking, abolition of slavery, and humanity.

ABOUT THE POEM

The poem “Freedom to the Slave” was written in February 1827 and published in the same year in *Poems* (1827). The volume of poems was printed at the Baptist Mission Press. At the time of writing this poem, Derozio, who was only 17, taught English literature and history at Hindu College. His personality and attitude made him dear to his students. He encouraged frequent debates in order to expand his students’ knowledge.

This poem is about the exquisite joy of a slave who is freed to be a man. The basic essence of this poem concerns the inherent happiness of being free in contrast to the pangs of subjugation, oppression, and most importantly slavery.

Derozio, being a vibrant voice of the Bengal Renaissance, hints at the slavery of Indians to the British East India Company by referring to an individual who was enslaved. Through writing this piece, he tried to make Indians desirous of the cherished freedom which not only emancipates a person mentally but also helps to expand the potential of one’s soul.

THEMES

The poem “Freedom to the Slave” taps on the themes of freedom, slavery, and patriotism. As the title says, this piece is all about the idea of freedom. But, Derozio explores this theme from the perspective of a slave who is freed from the chains of subjugation. In order to appreciate the theme, one has to look deeper into the mind of the slave. His exploration of the things that he was not able to cherish before reflects the inherent desire of a man to be free like the nature around him.

FORM

“Freedom to the Slave” is 28 lines long. Derozio groups the lines into a single stanza. Every four lines of the text form a unit (similar to a quatrain) and present a specific idea. There is only a difference in lines 9-16. Here, the poet packs the eight lines together. Besides, he writes the piece from the third person point of view and describes the happiness of the slave after getting freedom.

The rhyme scheme of the poem is regular and it follows the ABCB rhyming pattern. It is also known as the ballad rhyme scheme. For example, the second and fourth lines rhyme together while the first and third lines end with distinct sounds.

"And as the slave departs, the man returns." —Campbell
How felt he when he first was told
A slave he ceased to be;
How proudly beat his heart, when first
He knew that he was free!—
The noblest feelings of the soul
To glow at once began;
He knelt no more; his thoughts were raised;
He felt himself a man.
He looked above—the breath of heaven
Around him freshly blew;
He smiled exultingly to see
The wild birds as they flew,
He looked upon the running stream
That 'neath him rolled away;
Then thought on winds, and birds, and floods,

And cried, 'I'm free as they!' Oh Freedom!
there is something dear E'en in thy very name,
That lights the altar of the soul
With everlasting flame.
Success attend the patriot sword, T
hat is unsheathed for thee!
And glory to the breast that bleeds,
Bleeds nobly to be free!
Blest be the generous hand that breaks
The chain a tyrant gave,
And, feeling for degraded man,
Gives freedom to the slave.

SUMMARY

This poem begins with an allusion to Thomas Campbell's poem "Pleasures of Hope". Then the text directly jumps into the story of a slave who was enslaved. Right now, he is freed from the shackles of slavery. First and foremost, he realizes the hidden potential and noblest feelings buried inside his soul. It makes him kneel no longer to anyone. Once again, he feels himself a human being, not a creature destined to serve, suffer, and follow. Then Derozio delves deeper into the joy of the emancipated character. He looks around and realizes that he is now as free as the air, bird, and river. The flame of freedom has enlightened his soul's altar. In the next lines, he expresses his gratitude to all those who are fighting in order to make the slaves free. He wishes the almighty to bless those generous hands which break the chain of slavery in any form.



THANK YOU