The Language Of Andrew Marvell's The Nymph Complaining For The Death Of Her Fawn And William Shakespeare's Antony And Cleopatra

Love, romance, natural elements and nostalgia are key tropes of early modern poetry, and within both Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra and Andrew Marvell's The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn these themes are explored, and are central to the poems. Throughout Anthony and Cleopatra, we see how love translates into different forms, depending on the protagonists' environment. We see the variation between a sexual, passionate love, versus a loyal love, that is founded on a shared, national interest. The language Shakespeare uses within Anthony and Cleopatra demonstrates the change in Cleopatra's views towards her lover. The language varies depending on Antony's actions. For example, once Anthony has married Octavia, both Cleopatra's love and desire for him changes, as explored by Shakespeare. The most obvious transformative effect of love and desire within the poem is Cleopatra's nostalgia towards the love shared between her and Anthony. She says in Act 1 Scene 3,

"Nay, pray you, seek no color for your going,

But bid farewell and go. When you sued staying,

Then was the time for words. No going then!

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,

Bliss in our brows' bent, none our parts so poor

But was a race of heaven. They are so still,

Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,

Art turned the greatest liar."

This quotation demonstrates the transformation of the characters from one action. Antony's departure sparks a shift in Cleopatra, who is nostalgic towards the love they once shared, but more specifically for the desire that he had towards her. Within a short passage, she explores the change in not only him, but more generally, the change in them as a couple, and their change in desire. It seems, to her, as though the 'eternity' between them has vanished due to his seeming transformation from passion and desire to frigidness. It is from this passage that we see Cleopatra's emotional state decline. We witness in Act 2 Scene 5, Cleopatra strike the innocent messenger, the interaction is aggressive, with Cleopatra saying to the messenger,

"The most infectious pestilence upon thee!

Strikes him down

Messenger

Good madam, patience.

CLEOPATRA

What say you? Hence,

Strikes him again”

From this interaction, we see the depths of Cleopatra’s love. She is transformed, with her passion transforming into rage. Through the direct language of the stage directions, Shakespeare demonstrates how quickly love can transform a character’s behaviour and morality. Just moments earlier Cleopatra was waxing lyrical about the love she has for Antony. The sharp change in tone and the aggression demonstrates the polarising effects of love. Cleopatra’s attitude has changed, her love has changed, and her desire has transformed into hatred.

Cleopatra, throughout the poem, seems less interested romantically in her counterpart. The love she has towards Antony takes many different forms, adapting, strengthening and weakening. It seems to be a cyclical love. Despite her bouts of rage, or boredom, at times she seems enamoured in lust for Antony, even claiming,

“O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!

Do bravely, horse, for wott’st thou whom thou mov’st?

Within this text, we see her sexual desire towards Antony, wishing that it was she who could bear his weight. At other times, she seems nostalgic toward her counterpart, she explains how in her “salad days, / [she] was green in judgment, cold in blood”. This metaphor signifies her youthful naivety, innocence even. This quotation pertains to the idea of transformative love, as the love shared by Antony and Cleopatra has transcended eras, and they have grown together, yet now those ‘salad days’ have transformed, and as have they. We see Cleopatra’s love take many different forms throughout the poem, at times she seems content, claiming in Act 2 Scene 5, “Give me some music. Music, moody food Of us that trade in love.” She seems to revel in the feeling of being in love, and of feeling love. However, within the same scene she claims,

“I will betray

Tawny-finned fishes. My bended hook shall pierce

Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up

I’ll think them every one an Antony

And say, “Aha! You’re caught.”

She seems to seek vengeance for Antony one moment, whilst reminiscing in love the next. This inconsistency in love is mimicked even within the format of the poem. Antony and Cleopatra is

written in prose, and thus it doesn't have a specific pattern or rhythm to it. The inconsistency in love, and the unstructured rhyme scheme mirror one another. Cleopatra’s erratic behaviour is highlighted by the tumultuous nature of prose, and as is Antony’s inconsistent views and opinions that makes him so easy to manipulate.

As well as the mention to the metaphor of the horse, animal imagery is also used in the poem in the form of snakes. Throughout literature dating back as early as the Bible, serpentine symbolism has been used to display characters of wavering nobility. Within this poem, Antony calls Cleopatra in Act I Scene 5, his “serpent of old Nile”. A favourable reading of this metaphor could be that Antony is talking about her regal nature, as the goddess Isis used a ‘Wadget’, which is the name of the serpent on fire that protected her throne. Reading the text in this viewpoint still depicts Antony to be the doting partner to Cleopatra, who, in turn retains her goddess stature. However, when reading this animal metaphor from a different angle, it can be viewed as malicious, and as Antony implying that his partner is sly, untrustworthy or venomous toward him. The most likely reading of this snake metaphor is the latter, as later within the poem, in Act 5 Scene 2, Cleopatra attains a basket of ‘asps’ with the intent of killing herself by the venomous snake-bites. Just as Antony had called Cleopatra the “serpent of old Nile”, she herself had purchased “the worm of Nilus”, a parallel image and upon receiving instructions of the venom of the asp, the Countryman who gave her them ironically says, 'I wish you all joy of the worm”. Cleopatra’s imagery is heavily tied up with the imagery of serpents, and Shakespeare depicts her as a cunning character within the poem. Through the varying animal metaphors, Shakespeare demonstrates the varying emotions and desires of the characters.

Andrew Marvell’s The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn, written from the Nymph’s perspective, follows her relationship with vengeance, mourning and romantic nostalgia. Similar to Antony and Cleopatra, the poem contains death, animal imagery and betrayal. However, the rhyme scheme and language differ between the two texts.The prose that Marvell uses deems the Nymph to be almost childlike in her actions and her beliefs. Her most beloved companion has been murdered, yet she seems calm, and her ideas of revenge seem to be for the sake of the murderers, not for vengeance, as she claims,

“Ev’n beasts must be with justice slain,

Else men are made their deodands”

The men must die, although not for her satisfaction, but so they do not end up punished eternally in hell. The Nymph goes on to claim that even if these hunters “wash their guilty hands,” they can never be fully clean or absolved of this grievous sin. At this point, the Nymph’s narrative shifts to a memory of her former lover, Sylvio, and the happy time before she discovered that he had been unfaithful to her. Sylvio gave the nymph her fawn “Tied in this silver chain and bell,” as a symbol of his affections. Eventually, though, Sylvio “grew wild” and lost interest in the nymph, leaving her with the fawn while he “took his heart”. Throughout the poem, the nymph’s narrative shifts, upon reminiscing about her past, renegade lover. She explores her relation with Sylvio in terms of her relation with the fawn. Her lover, Sylvio had gone “counterfeit”, having been unfaithful to her. She reminisces the joyful times they spent together prior to his infidelity. He gifts her the fawn, “Tied in this silver chain and bell,” in an attempt to rekindle and forget his past actions, however, “Sylvio soon had [her] beguil’d, This waxed tane, while he grew wild; and quite regardless of [her] smart, Left [her] his fawn, but took his heart”. Marvell uses this shift in narrative to show the transformative effects of love and

desire, as there is a very cyclical notion between the death of the fawn, the metaphorical death of Sylvio's love and the death of the Nymph's final connection to her renegade lover. The death of the fawn now means there is no connection between her and Sylvio, and he gifted the Fawn to her. The final line of this stanza is poignant as the line, "left my his fawn, but took his heart" is the subversion to what is happening now, whereby the fawn's 'heart', or lifesource has been taken, and the Nymph is left alone. There is a constant changing between the three characters, with the Nymph left alone at the end. Through this triangular relationship, Marvell explores the transformative effects of love and desire.

Nicholas Guild, within Death, Loss, and Marvell's Nymph explores the idea that the death of the fawn represents much more than obviously depicted, and within the essay claims that, "the political overtones of "troopers" [turn] into a more generalised lament for innocence and the pastoral order" it is also stated that "Guild sees the entire poem as topical: a thinly disguised elegy for the old order in England, coupled with a grateful recognition that the old will indeed yield place to new". Guild's belief that the death of the fawn represents, on a broader level, the death of the Nymph's innocence ties the narrative of her relationship with Sylvio to the general subject of the poem. Marvell's poem is almost a lament, and the language he uses captures the transformative effects of love and desire, by demonstrating how despite the death of the fawn being immediate to the plot, the Nymph cannot help but relate this back to her old love, thus demonstrating that despite the transience of love within early modern poetry it often is the central focus of the poems.

Marvell's use of embellished language, rich in imagery makes the Nymph's grief seem almost indulgent. This indulgence is depicted most clearly through the use of decadent colours. Within the Nymph's narration there are colours aplenty, with the "wanton troopers" having a stain that is, "dyed in such a purple grain". The deer wore a "silver chain and bell", and "It wax'd more white", had "little silver feet". Upon the death of the fawn, the Nymph caught her "amber tears" in a "golden vial", while imaging her fawn in heaven with "milk-white lambs". The poem concludes with the Nymph lamenting the "purest alabaster" fawn. Marvell also creates a lavish setting, with "beds of lilies", "marble" and "whitest sheets". This opulent language displays the effect of Sylvio's forgone love on the narrator, and how it is this desire for Sylvio that marrs her pure grief of the fawn. She has intertwined the two, and is reminiscing in a nostalgic way the relationship with both. The language Marvell uses seems to romanticize the death, depicting the loss from death as in a similar grain to the loss of love.

Whilst the language and narration of the two poems mentioned differ, they focus around a similar theme, which is the lament of a love lost.The love within Antony and Cleopatra takes many forms. There is the individual love which is between the two protagonists, whose passion and desire sways their decisions and relationships with the other characters. However, as well as this, there is a more general love, the love of the Nation, and it is this conflict of love that Shakespeare follows within the poem. The love of the Nation impacts the individual love, and vice versa. The love of the Nation puts pressure on the individual love, while the individual love marrs judgement at the expense of the Nation. Through this convolution, Shakespeare demonstrates how love, in its different forms, can transform not only the individual, but people on much larger, even national scale. In comparison to this, the love displayed in Marvell's poem is the familial loss of the fawn, coupled with the nostalgic reminiscence of a romantic love lost. These two poems best explore how early modern poetry often depicts a range of love within one poem, and through this the reader can evaluate how love can adapt and take varying forms depending on the narration style, language. Furthermore, love and death tie in together as seen

within the two poems. Although the deaths within the two poems vary, they tie in with the theme of love. Within Antony and Cleopatra and the Tradition of Noble Lovers, Donna Hamilton explores the idea that the deaths of the protagonists is noble, and strong. She explains how in Chaucer's The Legend of Good Women he describes Cleopatra as "This noble quene" who died "with good chere,/For love of Antony" and from here, Hamilton claims, "there are at least two reasons why Antony and Cleopatra's place in the tradition of noble lovers should be of particular interest... First of all, the existence of the tradition casts doubt on the claims that Shakespeare drew solely upon unfavourable accounts of his characters… and second, it helps us to grasp another dimension of the artistry of the play". Cleopatra is deemed as noble, even in her death, she is valiant and passionate. The fawn was hunted, and so its death was passive, however, the story is still told from a female point of view. This female narration is not uncommon within early modern poetry, and as such, still places the Nymph in a position of nobility, as it is her voice and her story that is being heard.

The language of early modern poetry is often laden with metaphors, predominantly animal metaphors and references that seem biblical. These metaphors, rich in imagery allude to issues pertaining to loyalty, lust and deception. As explored, within the writing of Andrew Marvell and William Shakespeare, the form of the writing can mimic the subject of the poem and vice versa. When the form of the poem is erratic, often too are the actions of the characters. The narratives of early modern poetry are not always told simplistically from one narrator's point, and rather are varied in their positions, thus offering a unique standpoint to understand the story from a voice that is often forgotten. Furthermore, the language can quickly change, from nostalgic sentimentality, to aggression. The polarising language alludes to the polarising effects of love and desire and the contrasting effects that they can have on an individual.

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