

Name

Professor

Class

Due Date

Love and Beauty

In the poems “My Mistress’ Eyes” by Shakespeare and “To His Coy Mistress” by Andrew Marvell, love and beauty are depicted in ways that the reader would not expect. Traditionally, winning the affection of a woman is done through pretty words and promises. These two poems defy that rule by establishing a new form of beauty; the initial intention is to both make the women more realistic and attainable. However, after dissecting each poem, the reader can find that both speakers speak elegantly, but their true intentions are deceiving. Diction, imagery, and first-person perspective all combine to heighten the ultimate message of both poems: beauty and love can take on various forms. This is also where the reader can interpret their own perception of beauty and it allows the interpretation of the poem to expand for each individual reader.

The diction in “My Mistress’ Eyes” is far from the accepted way to compliment a woman on her beauty. Generally, a speaker will try to charm the muse by describing them with sappy and overused metaphors; however, this speaker uses words such as: “dun”, “wire”, and “reeks” to describe the muse, which would be considered condescending until the reader takes a look at the deeper meaning. The idea of beauty is challenged subtly throughout the poem, as the author essentially questions the concept of real vs. fake beauty. The opening lines: “my mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” immediately establish that the muse is unique in her looks. This is because it is traditional to describe women as impossible things, such as being as bright as the sun, or as beautiful as a rose. As the author immediately opening up the poem with a line that

almost insults the muse, he is separating her from any potential competition, which is to say that he will not be distracted from her despite any other people he may meet. This in itself is beautiful because it puts her in a category by herself. Another interesting line is “if hair be wires, black wires grow on her head” (Shakespeare 4). In saying this, the reader would automatically associate a negative connotation with “wires”; however, the author never established that he didn’t appreciate wires. His choice of this particular material accentuates the idea that she is unlike any other woman. The imagery of this word choice highlights the motive because one would picture something negative, but the intention is for the wire to be positive. Furthermore, the first-person perspective makes the entire effect of the poem become more personal because it allows the reader to feel more involved with the work as a whole.

The diction of this poem is extremely important because love poems usually contain words of affection and reverence, yet this one appears to be the opposite. However, it is in the words of indifference that the speaker reveals his true love; he loves his mistress because she is attainable. In this, the reader understands that her beauty is realistic and she is a real person, which makes her more beautiful simply because she is not this amazing figure that the speaker cannot have. Specifically, the speaker uses the line “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun”, which starts the poem with the concept that this muse is different from anything else because she is not the traditional form of beauty (Shakespeare 1). Although it is normal that a love poem contains affectionate terms of endearment, in the speaker not romanticizing this woman, he overall makes her more attractive and relatable to the reader.

In “To His Coy Mistress”, the speaker takes a strategic, yet still foreign, approach in describing his muse. It is written in a dramatic monologue, meaning that the speaker is revealing aspects of his character while describing the event at hand. In this, the first person perspective

gives a more personal level to the writing; the speaker is talking directly to his muse and is therefore more present in the poem. This is important because it means that the reader is unafraid to express himself directly to the muse; he is not only allowing the muse to get the full force of his affection, but also it makes the poem itself more relatable to the reader. Furthermore, he contrasts the idea of death vs. beauty by exploring the concept of time running out. This is where diction plays an important role; his original tone is perceived as playful and loving, but upon further inspection, it is clear that the tone changes throughout the work. The use of years as a measurement is relevant due to the use of "A hundred years should to go praise/Thine eyes," because it allows the reader to see the passionate time the speaker would take to elaborate on his feelings. The first stanza is where the speaker tries to enchant the woman by using imagery such as "my vegetable love". This means that his love is slowly growing, and he is implying that he would devote "an age at least to every part/...for, lady, you deserve this state"; in his saying this, the reader assumes that his love is genuine because that is the language used in love poems today.

However, in the second stanza, the tone changes more towards a warning, which exposes the speaker's true intentions of almost forcing the woman into choosing to have sex with him. He immediately starts with "But at my back I always hear/ Time's winged chariot hurrying near"; this change of tone changed so swiftly in order to scare the muse into realizing reality. The speaker is very tactical in this approach because he changes from trying to charm her into warning her that time is running out and she needs to make a decision. This is also a very important stanza because it's the turning point for the intentions; the speaker transitions from wanting the muse to love him to wanting the muse to feel as though there are no other options. Furthermore, there is a fascinating juxtaposition between the idea of death and love. In his saying

“then worms shall try/ that long-preserved virginity”, the speaker creates a highly disturbing image in which the woman essentially loses her virginity to the worms after her death. That image alone is enough to entirely dissuade somebody from the idea of love; he is saying that if she does not take his offer, she will die alone and his love will die with her.

This had the potential to be romantic if he had stated that his love would never die, but unfortunately he states “The grave’s a fine and private place/ but none I think there do embrace” which is essentially stating that his love has a time limit. This brings into the idea that his love is more closely related to lust, which is then further confirmed when there is no actual description of the muse herself. The speaker says how he would spend “two hundred to adore each breast”, which describes nothing about the woman’s actual features. This allows the reader to further examine the actual intentions of the speaker, and question on if his love is genuine or if he just wants the muse to consent so he can get what he truly desires: her body.

In the last stanza, the tone turns back flattering in saying “while the youthful hue/ sits on thy skin like morning dew”. This is an interesting line because although it appears to be playful and flattering, the speaker is ultimately telling the muse that she is young right now; there is no time like the present; she needs to consent to having sex with him before time runs out and death takes her. The initial intentions of the poem were to convince the muse that he would take the time to love her correctly, but then his true intentions come out and the reader can see that he just wants the woman to consent to sex.

The diction of the poem is exactly what catches the reader off guard because the first impression is that the speaker is a genuine person, but the underlying tone of word such as “like amorous birds of prey” imply that he is really just an aggressive person that has a talent for charming someone. However, the imagery of the poem as a whole is beautiful: “And while thy

willing soul transpires/ At every pore with instant fires””; this laces together an idea in which two people can love each other and appreciate each aspect of the other. In this, the reader can conclude that the outside of the poem is mesmerizing, but in between the lines is where the true intentions of the speaker appear.

Overall, both poems are definitely love poems, they just differ in style and intentions. The first poem, “My Mistress’ Eyes”, focuses more on actually complimenting the muse, but doing so in such an uncommon way that it appears to be negative. The second poem, “To His Coy Mistress”, appears to be more romantic, but in the end, it’s really just a ruse to win the affection of the woman in a devious way. The diction in these poems are what separate and define them. The first poem makes the woman more realistic, which in itself is a beautiful and romantic idea. The second poem makes the woman feel so good about herself and so positive of the man’s love, that she would change her mind in order to be with him. It is clear that this is the case in the second poem because his language is extremely persuasive, meaning that he was essentially trying to convince the woman to trust him. However, the subtlety of the first poem becomes more romantic, because he is talking about the woman instead of to her; in this, one can assume that he’s just talking of his mistress and relishing in how real she is. In the other poem, the speaker is talking directly to the woman in order to convince her that his love is genuine. The main difference between these two poems is that they approach love from completely different angles; one makes the woman more beautiful by saying how average she is, whereas the other makes the woman so confident in her looks that she feels she has no choice but to let the speaker have what he wants. This says a lot of society in how women are expected to react to certain forms of flattery. In the first poem, the woman is initially expected to be upset because of the

supposed demeaning description of her, and yet the poem that actually has malicious intentions is the one in which the woman finds herself more appreciated.

There is an interesting expectation of love poems; society expects that the more the speaker praises the muse, the more the love must be genuine. However, these two poems are an exact example of why that is not always the case. Both of the poems express love and beauty, yet the poem that appears to have negative connotations is the one that expresses a more genuine love. This is also a prime example that first impressions are not always correct, as well as the idea that love and the perception of beauty are not always directly related. In the first poem, the speaker emphasizes how beauty does not necessarily mean something that stands above the rest. In the second poem, the reader learns that beautiful words can hide a darker meaning. Overall, both poems true meaning were not the same as the initial impression of them. This allows the reader to interpret their own meaning of beauty by deciding which poem captures it on a more realistic level.