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AFRICAN AND NON-AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE: A COMPARATIVE LINGUISTIC STUDY OF MARVELL'S TO HIS COY MISTRESS AND SOYINKA'S TO THE PIPER DAUGHTERS

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Abstract

This paper makes a comparative linguistic study of the philosophy of love in African and European contexts using Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' and Wole Soyinka's 'The Piper Daughters'. The study explores through their language use, their cultural nuances which are evident in their various approaches to their themes. The Chomskyan Generative Theory of grammar was applied to study the various levels of linguistic analysis, namely graphology, phonology, morphology, syntax and lexico-semantics. It was found out that the Europeans are direct, sincere and persuasive in their approach to love, while the Africans are chauvinistic. Their interests and emotions about love for the opposite sex are couched in impersonal statements.

Introduction

Love is a strong feeling of affection. Another meaning of love is extended to a strong feeling of affection or sexual attraction. Love is a universal phenomenon. There are many forms of love, but the type that occurs in the poems under study is the type that is expressed between the opposite sex. Love is a fundamental relationship which could lead the persons involved to a more serious association.

The English cultural ideology of love is exemplified in the poems by English poets e.g. 'To Mistress Isabel Pennell by John Skelton, a 16th century English Poet, and 'To Mistress Margaret Hussy' by the same poet. Another 16th century poet, Sir Thomas Wyatt, has his as 'To His Lady'. William Shakespeare a 17th century poet entitles his 'O Mistress Mine (from Twelfth Night). Andrew Marvel, a 17th century poet, entitles his own 'To His Coy Mistress'. A 19th century poet, William Cowper entitles his 'To Mary'. The common thing about these poems is that they are devoted to showing affection to women. Love is very natural and must be handled with caution, otherwise it could exceed its bounds, negatively or positively. From the examples given, one can state that no-matter how engaging a poet's work appears to him, he can carve out time to express this natural feeling. On the one hand, the African ideology of love is that love and passion for the opposite sex can be expressed, but the cultural leaning towards chauvinism of the male folk, robs them of the finesse of expression of love for the opposite sex. On the other hand, the English disposition to love is overt and straight forward. They combine patience with persuasion. In other words, they woo the opposite sex in order to achieve their purpose.

The poets whose poems are being studied in this paper have different cultural backgrounds which inform their approaches to the poems. In the Western world, the practice of having a mistress i.e. relationship outside the conjugal marriage is treated with compromising and accommodating silence in their culture, such that men celebrate other women folk outside their marriage, by openly naming them mistress, which association in harsher terms could be called concubines, like Solomon who was famous to have had 300 concubines. Although men are by nature polygamous, it is a rape of

the sanctity of marriage order, in a society that promotes one wife for one man. The English poets of earlier centuries celebrated their mistresses through their poems, thereby exposing their ideologies of man-women relationship. In the African setting where it is adopted the system of one man one wife (for some religions), some men maintain illegal relationships with women outside their marriages and because such a culture or religion abhors a practice like this, wives generally protest against this practice, because it brings along with it matrimonial problems which people tag infidelity in marriage and which could lead to divorce. That is why men that attempt to practise that kind of deceitful life style make the association a matter of confidentiality.

Many responsible men would not want to be associated with this kind of practice, but it abounds in the African culture. Because of covert acquiescence and lack of punitive measures attached to love outside marriage, poets celebrate these mistresses in the Western world. The poems under study comparatively show how this phenomenon is viewed and practised by the men folk in both cultures. Andrew Marvel, a 17th century English Poet in his poem, 'To his Coy mistress', displays the art of wooing a lady for whatever purpose. He systematically combines wit, reasoning, and persuasion, to try to convince his mistress to accept his love, which he feels is unrequited, because of the mistress' modesty. It is traditionally a high level of morality to preserve one's virginity both by men and women, and that had yielded bounteous dividend in marriages in the previous centuries, and still does so, even in this present century both for the family and society at large.

The poem, 'To His Coy Mistress,' is divided into three distinct parts, each stating its proposal in the process of wooing. Although the poem is arranged in lines as poems usually are, the presentation is prosaic and that is to enable the mistress to understand his (the poet's) line of argument. If any twisted construction is used, it may bring about ambiguity, which the poet may not entertain. The first part, which has an unusual number of 20 lines within that stanza, contains a hypothetical presentation of how he would have showed his love to his mistress, if they had all the time in the world at their disposal. By this, he states the ironical account of the slowness of the process of their love, if the lady continues her disdainful attitude. The second stanza of 12 lines debunks her reason for morality and maintaining her virginity, since her virginity would no longer be useful after her death. The third stanza of 14 lines concludes his argument and states what both of them would gain if they should agree to have a union and celebrate their love. Because the topic is presented in an argumentative form, it is prone to verbosity and rephrasing. The opening sentence attests to this:

Had we but world enough, and time, this coyness, lady, were no crime.

He approaches his topic with utmost care and respect for the mistress. He has not told her that she is wasting his time to decide on his proposal and neither has he condemned her philosophy of life, about man-woman relationship, that is abstaining from illicit love affair. If they had all the time in the world, he has outlined his line of actions namely: 'we would sit down and think which way to walk, and pass our long-love's 'day'. (Lines, 3-4, (underpinnings mine). The underlined words don't show him as being in a hurry, if all time belongs to them. But unfortunately, it doesn't. He maps out further, how he intends to spend his love time which includes:

Thou by the Indian Ganges side should rubies find. I by the side of Humber would complain.
(Lines 5 and 6)

The above exercise is time consuming. In other words it is an idle, time-consuming and wasteful exercise which the mistress would engage in. Both actions yield no positive results. As if time is not yet adequately wasted, he would set aside ten years to love her if she pleases and that is before the next flood, while she has a right to refuse. He would spend a hundred years to adore her eyes, two hundred years to adore each breast but thirty thousand to the rest. He reassures her that she deserves all this. To contrast the previous stanza, he makes her see reason and reality of time being

wasted.

But at my back I always hear
 Time winged chariot hurrying near
 And yonder all before us lie
 Deserts of vast eternity
 Lines 20-24

He simply reminds her that time is not on their side, like the nursery rhyme which reads 'Tick says the clock tick tick. What you have to do, do quick.' He puts stark truth before her and laments how at her death, the 'worms shall try that long preserved virginity and how her 'quaint honour would turn to dust', (lines 27-28) and all his lust for her would have turned to ashes'.

The third stanza and last part of 14 lines concludes his argument and brings to limelight the need for them to utilize her youthful age. He suggests:

Let us roll all our strength and all our sweetness up into one ball
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife through the iron gate of life;
 (Lines 41-43.)

Graphologically, the poet employs close punctuation by using commas very closely e.g. in the first two lines, he used four commas to mark off his speech thus:

Had we but world enough, and time,
 This coyness, lady, were no crime.

He also uses colons and semicolons to mark off items and also to list his strategies of operation. Because this poem is presented like a speech, the punctuation marks are necessary for the purpose.

Grammatically, the propositional nature of the poem is underscored by the type of sentence structure used. Because the persona is still trying to woo the lady, the prosaic sentences are spiced up with poetic structures. This is evident in the examples below:

- (a) We would sit down, and think which way to walk, and pass our long love's day, (prose-like structure) lines 3-4.
- (b) Thou by the Indian Gange's side should rubies find: I by the tide of Humber would complain. (Lines 5-7) (Poetic structure)
- (c) Now, therefore, while the youthful like sits on the skin like morning dew
 And while thy willing soul transpires
 At every pore wit instant fires, now let us sport us while memory lives (lines 33-37).
 (prose-like structure)
- (d) Rather at once our tie devour,
 Than vanquish in his slow-chapt power. (lines 38-39.)

From the above examples, it can be deduced that the poet makes frantic effort to convince his mistress by coaxing her with varied types of sentence structures. His argument employs hyperbolic statements like

- (i) My vegetable love shall grow vaster than empires... (lines 11-12).
- (ii) A hundred years shall go to praise thine eyes....
 Two hundred to adore each breast,
 But thirty thousand to the rest
 An age at least to every part.
 And the last age should show your heart
 (lines 13-18)

The time and age proposed by the persona to love, admire and tend his mistress is like he has full control of the universe in time and space. This simply shows how all his life, he will busy himself expressing his love for her. (line 11).

His use of imagery like 'vegetable love' is to express the ability of his love to grow like vegetables but if not utilized, could perish. He compares her freedom to refuse his proposal with the expression 'till the conversion of the Jews', (line 10) which means that he will continue to pressure on as long as both of them live, with or without hope of success. He compares her youthful hue 'to morning dew', which he says 'sits on her skin' (line 33). This is an example of violation of selectional restriction rule. In the normal English code, the verb sits should select as its subject a noun with features/+animate, + human) But here it selects a noun, youthful 'hue' with features /-concrete -human/. Expressions like 'tear our pleasures with rough strife' gives a picture of how they, with their youthful strength, would enjoy their love.

His constant use of the co-coordinating conjunction, 'and' for over fifteen times, shows the persona's hope of having himself and his mistress joined together as he wishes and also uses it to bind together his argument of trying to convince his mistress for them to 'roll all our strength and all our sweetness up into one ball'. (lines 40-41)

The adverb, 'now' is used twice in the third and last stanzas to conclude his argument thus:

Now, therefore, while the youthful hue,, (line 33)

Now, let us sport us while we may, (line 37)

Phonologically, the poet in this arduous task of coaxing his mistress manages to maintain a rhyme pattern which tries to be consistent for a long while through the poem of 46 lines. In a few instances, he jerks off the rhyme pattern and realigns. Such lines are:

Lie/eternity lines 23/24

Try/virginity lines 27/28

The constant rhyme scheme, which is maintained, reflects the harmony that will exist between the persona and his mistress if the persona's proposal eventually succeeds.

The lexical items employed in this process of winning this 'case' is worthy of note. If they have all the time in the world, the persona uses the finding of rubies in Ganges River in India as an apt time-consuming exercise because, since rubies are precious stones, one would take his life time searching for them. The word rubies takes its origin from the latin word 'rubinus'. They are precious stones which people search for and which they may or may not likely find. 'Times winged chariot' (line 22) describes the swiftness with which time passes. Here, the expressions, 'time flies', 'worms' (line 27) are used to give a picture of uselessness of a treasure when not put to use, like her 'long-preserved virginity, which the worms would attack in her mistress' grave. All her efforts to preserve her virginity not utilized until death, is described as 'quaint honour'. (Line 29).

'Sport' (line 37) is the game of love according to the language of the persona 'Now let us sport us while we may'. He likens both of them to 'amorous birds of prey' (line 38), which would 'devour' something being eaten, with speed out of hunger. In other words, the persona feels their time has been so much wasted and it is time for them to act. The result of this action is 'rolling their strength and sweetness into one ball' (line 42). One ball is the metaphor for harvest of mating which is a life. The 'iron gates of life' is used to express the difficulties of life which both of them would share.

Andrew Marvell, in this poem, brings one thing to focus, which could be juxtaposed with the next poem from his African counterpart. The poem is entitled 'To the Piper Daughters' by Wole Soyinka. Both poems share the same theme that is man-woman relationship. While Marvell openly discusses his theme by presenting his title for what it is, Soyinka couches his title in a metaphor. In other words, 'To His Coy Mistress, as a title, is overt while 'To The Piper Daughters' is covert. Marvell's sincerity is stated in his language use while Soyinka with his metaphoric approach

bamboozles the reader, making it difficult for the reader to locate his theme. Marvell addresses his mistress while Soyinka distances himself from the association using the title "Piper Daughters." But the first line of the poem reveals his position vis-a-vis the Piper daughters. This aspect will be discussed later.

Soyinka prefers to call his 'mistress' the Piper daughters because he prefers anonymity of relationship. Why use the word Piper to qualify the daughters?

The Poem: 'To the Piper Daughters'

"To the Piper Daughters", reveals the relationship enjoyed by the poet with women in the foreign countries of his sojourn, women of distinction, blended with beauty. He prefers to call them 'Piper daughters' because they own a kind of 'Pipe' which attracts people, especially those of the opposite sex. The word piper, drawn from the poem 'The Pied Piper of Harmelen', is used as a metaphor which creates a picture of magnetic attraction. The music played by the Piper of Harmelen was so fascinating that he was able to draw out of the city of Harmelen all menacing rats as they listened undistractingly to his music and so followed him out of the city. So it is with the piper daughters who irresistibly draw the opposite sex to them. Soyinka's first line reads:

Seeking - as who has not?-beauty
Lodged in concaves of the yielded; (lines 1-2)

The above lines aptly tell the reader that the poet has not been left out in the act of seeking for that beauty. The clause 'as who has not', with a question mark, dares anyone especially men who claim they have not played the 'game', including himself.

The poem is equally divided into three definable parts. The first part is the reminiscence of shared love between the persona and the Piper daughters who in their 'innocence' 'yielded' to the demand. The experience is described by the persona as 'conniving lies with self-encrimsoned mists'. The crimsoned deep red colour of the skin can only be attributed to the white race and the mists are as a result of the excitement of love making. He reminds them that their 'laugh' means their 'warmth given', unfortunately in their 'innocence' (lines 4-6)

The second part deals with admonition given by the persona, where he warns them never to exchange their bodies for any gifts or goodies especially as they have tried to hoard them till the time the persona is speaking. This task has earned them admiration as a highly prized stone – 'pearls', He compares the height of distinction they have attained to that of an 'ordinary clan'. He advises them to react vehemently to any person seeking their love even a 'cozening priest' paying them compliments. They should 'riddle him with lethal pips!' (Line 25)

The third part reiterates the warning of what the persona would not have any one of them do, 'I would not have you age?' (Line 26). By ageing, the persona warns them of living a careless, carefree life which he refers to as 'filter dust in the sun', unless they are ready to accommodate its result. He calls it 'dance glad anguish of the mother rites' (line 35), which result will be 'the stranger essence sprung from your goodness'. (Lines 35-37) He sounds a final note of warning, 'I would you thus never, never old.

One of the differences between the two poems is that while Marvell woos his mistress, with every bit of modesty and sense of reservation, this persona takes advantage of the Piper daughters' innocence and later admonishes them not to engage in reckless lives with men, unless they are ready to do 'the dance of the mother rite', which will surely unravel seeds and finally make them old.

Structurally, this poem is put into stanzas which are interspersed with short lines broken up into one word or a phrase to a line. These lines are loaded with information about the poem e.g.

Your laugh
 Meant,
Your warmth,
 Given,
And innocence
 Lightly

Second one is

To the date
 A stone
The linnet
 Height
Pearls
 Depth and the clam

These are telegraphically arranged and it requires a hard reader to join the pieced up information to make a whole. The step-like arrangement of the lines shows the stepping down of their lives and age from their age of innocence to adult and aging stage. The asymmetrical arrangement of the lines gives the positions of male and female partners in the game of love. There are superfluous use of dashes, dots and exclamation marks which the poet uses to hoard information expecting the reader to make conjectures to fill up the gaps. For example:

As your nest footfall-unpracticed, left after tight-this, your revelation. (Lines 10 and 11)

There is hardly any provision for rhymes and rhythm because the piper daughters are being admonished placing before them the results of certain actions they might practise. Grammatically, some sentences are plainly given so as not to mince words. e.g.

I would not have you cruel nor change
Your largesse for the slits (lines 13 and 14)
I would not have you age. I swear
I would not have you filter
Dust in the sun unless you-like the wind.

(Line 26-28)

I would you
Thus, never never old. (Lines 37-38)

Some expressions are loaded with meaning and unless they are demystified, the reader may not successfully get to the hidden meaning of the poem. Such expressions are 'beauty lodged in concaves of the yielded.'

The poet locates where the beauty he means is, and it is only found if the partner yields.

There are instances of category rule violation when words have been severed from their grammatical classes and made to serve in another class e.g. 'I would not have you cruel nor change' (line 13). 'Cruel' which is an adjective is made to perform the function of a verb. This is to enforce his order. 'I would you never, never old' (line 38). 'Old' is also used as a verb in (line 25).

- ii. Riddle him with lethal pips'. This instruction spells out deadly action for anyone who tries to say 'how your cheeks are rudded like the ...?' (line 24).
- iii. Dance glad anguish of the mother rites' (line 35)

This is an oxymoronic expression. The dance is glad and at the same time produces anguish. The anguish is the stranger essence which results from dance of the mother rites.

The stranger essence is a noun in apposition to unravel seeds in 'unravel seeds, the stranger essence'. This gives more meaning to the word unravel.

The beauty of this poem is the concealing of the theme by using metaphors. The title is metaphorised. At the lexical level, 'piper daughters' is used to mean mistresses, 'largesse', a non-common word, stands for gifts, generosity of money; 'hoarded goodness', line 15 is taken to mean sexual abstinence, 'slits' refer to womanhood, 'cozening priest' is taken to mean any deceitful tricky person.

In conclusion, the themes and different approaches to man-woman relationships in the two cultural settings determine the language use, choice of words and presentation by the two poets, Marvell and Soyinka.

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