To the Fair Clarinda Analysis by Aphra Behn

Posted on October 9, 2018

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Thesis

The loving character of Clarinda is addressed by the author as both masculine and feminine. The character of Clarinda includes both genders, which are clearly playful, seductive, and conflicting. The author enjoys her sexual desires with Clarinda and her male and female characteristics.

Introduction

Not only was Aphra Behn one of the first professional women writers, but she also worked as a spy for the British government. She was the most respectable writer of the restoration period; she wrote many famous novels and poems, including To the Fair Clarinda. Who Made Love to Me, Imagined More than Woman. The writer portrayed the emotions truly that belonged to a woman in the old period with excellent ability,/ She was a who was born a hermaphrodite) in love; the poem is very attractive to catch the attention of people because it is a loving narration of the writer, which expresses a passionate feeling coming straight from the heart ("Aphra Behn's Poem To The Fair Clarinda Essay – 705 Words | Bartleby.," 2018; "More Than Wo/Man: Androgyny In The Poetry Of Aphra Behn – Christine Hoff Kraemer.," 2018).

The feelings of love towards another woman are described in the poem beautifully. The author is very clear in her thoughts and not too shy to say what she has to say; Behn views Clarinda as a woman rather than a hermaphrodite in her eyes. This theme of the poem is loving as well as conflicting. In the first few lines, the theme of the poem speaks for itself and the message the poet is trying to give.

Analysis

The author Behn calls Clarinda her Fair Lovely Maid, first of all, which represents a woman or a female, but later on, she goes on to express that she should name her in a more masculine way because Clarinda's name is obviously too weak and too feminine. As the poem moves forward, the author suggests the name Lovely Charming Youth for her beloved Clarinda. Lovely Charming Youth is the type of name that can become a perfect fit for describing or expressing love for a man or a woman; it also shows that Clarinda in the poem is actually playing the role of a male or man.

The life and relationship of the author with Clarinda are amazing and full of loving emotions; not only is Clarinda playing the role of a man or male in the poem, but also a man anatomically, which might even better suit her due to having the best of both genders. Clarinda is considered to be a perfect person because she is the most beautiful thing anyone could ever want, including the author herself. These generate feelings of love for the author that are hard to imagine and make the character of Clarinda almost unreal.

The above scenario makes the readers of the poem a little bit uncertain about what the author is trying to prove here, or whether the author Behn herself is unsure of or possibly debating the true gender role of Clarinda in the poem. In the very beginning of the poem, the labels are changing, which reflects a conflicting picture of Clarinda as a man, a woman, or both.

No matter what she is trying to portray regarding the gender of Clarinda, one thing is truly clear: the author is quite content with the role and existence of Clarinda when she is referring to her. The author uses the words “thy,” “thee,” and “thou,” and she does not make it clear to reveal the gender of Clarinda by using he or she. This again portrays an uncertainty about the role of Clarinda as a male or a female in the eyes of the author.

While considering the line “beauteous wonder of a different kind” towards the end of the poem, one can understand that Clarinda is a hermaphrodite, which is clearly reflected towards the end of the line. She could be presented that this different kind would be Clarinda while showing that she is too attracted to and attached to Clarinda emotionally and physically. The love is undeniable in the feelings of the author for Clarinda. The author gives several hints throughout the poem that Clarinda is a hermaphrodite; for example, by looking at the end of the first stanza, it becomes clear what Clarinda is supposed to be. “For who that gathers fairest flowers believes- A snake lies hid beneath the fragrant leaves.”

To the Fair Clarinda is a playful and erotic piece of writing by the author Behn, who is a female herself; it is a love poem that is surprisingly modern and emotionally touching. The loving character of Clarinda is addressed by the author as both masculine and feminine. The roles of masculine and feminine are important in the sexual conquest of a woman, as explained by Behn; through the lines of a poem, the author is trying to give a message that in any kind of sexual relationship, there are two definite roles of either masculine or feminine (“To My Fair Clarinda – Writework.,” 2018).

The poem is not an example of how male and female anatomy works in sexual relationships; it is a representation of the author’s love for her character Clarinda who is either a man or a woman with a conflicting identity. The title is gender-specific, which was used in the seventeenth century for the attraction of young people. The speaker in the poem is obviously Clarinda, who is not obviously a male or a maid; Clarinda is an active entity rather than playing a passive role, as mentioned by the author by saying, “neither weak nor feminine.”

The author is trying to present the problem by simply applying both titles to her loving Clarinda by calling her a fair lovely maid as well as a lovely, charming youth, which represents her masculine

identity. It provides a seductive charm and warm emotions of the author; the language fairly represents Clarinda as a masculine or feminine character possessing both qualities.

Being a charming youth and a fair maid, Clarinda herself is both a feminine character and a masculine character in the poem. The suggestion of the poet is that the masculine or feminine dichotomy is still valid; the attributes of Clarinda are possible to choose from both genders, but in no sense is Clarinda genderless. The next passage of the poem treats Clarinda as the maid and represents the youth. The author represents Clarinda as a speaking entity who is flirting and seductive in nature. The following line depicts a clear message from the author:

“This last [the youth] will justify my soft complaint, / While that [the maid] may serve to lessen my constraint;. .”

It describes the masculine or male half of Clarinda with which the author has fallen in love; it also justifies that the sexual attraction towards Clarinda is strong for the author. The author feels pretty unconstrained and free to describe her feelings of love and sexual interest in Clarinda, unlike any other male or female author. She is free to provide deeper insight into her desires and secret emotions for Clarinda. The lack of social consequences also stems from the sense of freedom in the author because, in these feelings, there is no chance of getting pregnant or losing her virginity.

The fact is that the author portrays Clarinda as the conflicting male or female, suggesting that there is intimacy in their relationship, whether that relationship is a same-sex relationship or a different-sex relationship. The speaker also implies that she has nothing to hide before Clarinda because she is also a woman in her eyes, and she is not afraid to reveal herself to another woman. She is fully aware that a woman like Clarinda has the same sexual feelings and desires as the author.

The poem shows that Clarinda is a character who is hard to resist for the young author; their relationship is purely loving, which shows the liberation and freedom of the author in the seventeenth century. The speaker is struggling with her desires as she would with a man, and she is obviously experiencing some pain. The readers can easily judge that the strong pain of the author is mostly self-inflicted and has nothing to do with the behavior of her loving character Clarinda. Her supposed pain is not an agony in a negative sense; rather, this pain is giving her pleasure, which a woman can experience. The following line can explain the point:

“Against thy charms, we struggle but in vain”

It is mentioned in a plain and playful tone that the pain is not only sweet but it is prolonged. It is inevitable as well in a playful nature when Clarinda is using her female body to serve her lustful masculine mind. Clarinda is not only seducing the author with her masculine characteristics but also doing a good job being playful with the author while being feminine; Clarinda is enjoying playing her feminine role as well as her masculine role.

The fact that the speaker is changing her tone from “I” to “we” explains that Clarinda is playing a double role of masculine and feminine. The author has already made things clear by accepting the dichotomy of a traditional male or female; when Clarinda is exhibiting male behavior, she is being masculine. At the same time, when Clarinda is exhibiting female behavior, she is a feminine character. Whether a maid or a nymph, the author is associating her with womanhood, which shows her strong side of femininity exhibiting feminine sexual behavior.

The author says that a woman can behave in a feminine manner. First, she may struggle to express her sexual desires, but at last, she becomes open and free to give in to her desires, as portrayed in Behn’s poem. In England, Behn is obviously talking about the sexual activity between the women of her time and adding playfully, “For who that gathers fairest flowers believe / A snake lies hid beneath the fragrant leaves.” This line obviously gives the impression of an aggressive and strong masculine identity inside the character of Clarinda. Behind the mind, Clarinda has a sweet feminine role as well as an aggressive male role. The first stanza also shows Clarinda as a seductive character.

The beginning stanzas of the poem also reflect truly the sexual desires of the author and make several references to the act of physical lovemaking in the poem. It is talking about the naked form of Clarinda by saying, “When so much beauteous woman is in view,” which suggests a playful and somewhat forceful seduction towards the author.

The language of the speaker in the poem also expresses the full-blown sexual fantasy in which Clarinda is literally acting as a male and female, but the poem does not provide any clear evidence that Clarinda is a hermaphrodite. The author is simply expressing her idea that she is enjoying lovemaking with a male character as well as with a female character. The character of Clarinda physically reflects what is in the mind of the speaker in a modest language that is playful and seductive. The personality of Clarinda suggests that she has a playful nature, which helps the author to join her in intercourse.

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